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Y O U N G L O V E ;

A N O V E L.

BY

MRS. TROLLOPE,

AUTHORESS OF "THE VICAR OF WREXHILL," "THE BARNABYS IN
AMERICA," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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Y O U N G L O V E.

CHAPTER I.

“ I HAVE sent away my maid, Amelia, I suppose you do not want her ?”

These words, though very softly pronounced, startled the beautiful Amelia Thorwold, as she stood yawning before her mirror, after the first evening of her visit at the Mount had come to a close ; for the speaker had entered in her padded silken slippers, with so soft a tread, that she was quite unaware of her approach.

“ Good heaven, Mrs. Knight, how you

startled me !" she exclaimed. "No, certainly, I do not much want a maid to-night—I am so horridly tired, that if I had fifty maids I would not have my hair brushed now. But what is the matter? Why did you send her to bed?"

"The matter, Amelia, is, that I wish to have a little serious conversation with you before we either of us go to sleep. I am tired, too, I promise you—a fact which you probably will find no great difficulty in believing. But tired or not, I will not submit to another day of Mrs. Dermont's exhilarating conversation without being quite sure that it is likely to answer. We both agreed to come here, I believe, from the same motive, namely, to give this blooming young squire time and opportunity to fall in love with you. At least, I can answer for myself; for there is nothing upon earth that I hate like staying in a dull country house, among a set of people who have not a single idea in common with me. Am I right in supposing it was your motive also? I do beg and entreat that you will tell me the truth."

"Yes," replied Miss Thorwold, yawning violently; "if I know my own heart, as the heroines say, it certainly was my motive."

"Amelia! I will have no jesting, and you must be pleased to forgive me, if I remind you that you are not in a position to permit any sort of levity on such a subject. Is it your intention to marry this young Adonis, if you can?"

"What a mode of putting the question," replied Miss Thorwold, looking into the glass, before which she had now seated herself, while her friend stretched her weary person on a chaise lounge at no great distance from her. "Do you really feel any doubt, Mrs. Knight, as to the family purposes, in giving us this most singular invitation?"

"No, Amelia, not at all; it does not require much acuteness to read the whole story from first to last. This youth, the hope, the only hope, you know, of his snugly well-acred family, has doubtless been the petted idol of both father and mother from the moment that he first drew breath, and this petting, it is not very difficult to see,

has ended by his having his own way in every thing. Your charms, my dear, which I assure you I by no means under-rate, are quite of the kind to inflame the heart of such a youth as this into a whirlwind of love. He has never yet passed a season in town, and is quite unconscious of the fact that there, though not here, there are more Amelias to be had—pardon my inelegant bluntness, my dear—both for love and money. Now, as I guess, this unsophisticated youth, having, on the contrary, made up his mind to believe that no second goddess of equally Venus-like perfection can walk the earth, has informed his papa and mamma that he cannot, by any means, think of living any longer single, and that if they do not immediately give their aid and assistance to his marrying Miss Thorwold, he shall make away with himself. Whereupon, as I guess, the exemplary parents decide upon this invitation project, as the best way of saving the life of their heir, and then the mamma bustles off to settle it. To be sure, the set they have got together does not promise very

much in the way of social enjoyment during your future residence in this pretty village of Stoke ; but I dare say you may be able to find ways and means, my dear, of varying the scene a little. But be this as it may, you must perceive that you have no reason to quarrel with me because I doubt the reality of your conquest ; and you must perceive, also, that I do not bring into the account of probabilities any of your previous disappointments. I know perfectly well that the total difference in the characters and business of the scene may be safely calculated upon as likely to lead to a different catastrophe. No, it is not now to calculate the chances of this young man's being in earnest, or not in earnest, that I now come to invade your needful hours of rest. Such things have been certainly, but the present affair is quite a different sort of thing ; so different indeed, that it is the very certainty of his being in earnest, which causes my anxiety. I am afraid of you, Amelia—I am afraid, dreadfully afraid, that when you get as heartily sick, as I know you will do, of the place and the people, not excepting the

swain himself, who, handsome as he is, can hardly fail, with his total ignorance of every thing one cares for most, soon to become a horrible bore; I am dreadfully afraid, I say, that you will begin to yawn when you ought to sigh, and to sneer when you ought to smile. I have, therefore, thought it my duty for Lord Ripley's sake, Amelia,—who really has enough to plague him, without your adding to it,—to tell you plainly at once, that I must insist upon it you take care what you are about, and that you do not expose me to this detestable bore for nothing."

While Mrs. Knight pronounced this harangue, which, notwithstanding a tolerably rapid utterance, was rather long, the beautiful Amelia began, rather poutingly, to disembarass her slender fingers of their rings, and to remove sundry pins from her graceful bust, to the pin-cushion; but when the voice of her monitress ceased, and that she found that she was expected to reply, an expression of something like sullenness took possession of her charming features, which was speedily

followed by the sneer of which her judicious friend had warned her.

“ I really wish, Mrs. Knight, that when you think proper to lecture me, you would do it in your own name, and not in that of my uncle. Nor is it at all necessary that you should so often endeavour to impress upon my mind, that whatever interest you feel for me, is only because I belong to him. Were I you, I really should not be so very anxious to point this out upon all possible occasions. However, I only say this to show that, notwithstanding your having the advantage of half a dozen more years of experience than myself, I am not quite incapable of giving advice in my turn. Do not let us quarrel, however, it would be exceedingly silly for many reasons. You are very lively and agreeable, and your house is a great convenience to me. I am, I presume, rather ornamental, and my presence is occasionally very convenient to you, so pray let us continue the same affectionate friends as usual. As to all you have said, my dear,

concerning Master Alfred Dermont, and his expected thousands per annum, I have nothing whatever to say against it. Yes, he is an only son and heir, which is an immense advantage in such a speculation as the present, and I have no doubt that if I were mistress of this place, I could make it look very decently respectable. Neither will I deny that you have some reason to be afraid of me, seeing that I am a good deal afraid of myself. If it could be done at once, Mrs. Knight, if I could be married to the boy before breakfast to-morrow morning, I think the comfortable certainty that he, and not I, would have to find the cash necessary for the discharge of the various little bills I have been, as you know, absolutely obliged to run up since my mother died, I think this consideration, dwelt upon resolutely, through all the waking hours of the coming night, would inspire me with strength to marry him in the morning. But whether my poor shattered spirits will bear the wear and tear of his young love, backed by all the delicate

attentions of his father and mother, from noon till dewy eve, through Heaven knows how many days—I cannot tell.”

“TILL dewy eve, my dear,” said Mrs. Knight, laughing. “Pray do not beguile yourself with the belief that you shall escape upon the arrival of dewy eve. For, to say nothing of the animating excitement of a waltz of three couples, and a partner in his teens, by which your nights are to be invaded, it seems likely that you will have to keep company with dewy eve herself in all her dripping freshness. Did you look at that horrible girl who assisted your respected mother-in-law in doing propriety for you this evening? Did you look at her lank black locks when she came in after your moonlight ramble? Fortunately you, and Annette together, have a way of getting up a head, and a face too, for a night’s wear, in a style that may defy any thing short of a shower of rain. But, for the sake of my silk dresses and shoes, I would not yield any more to this nightingale-style of wooing, were I you, Amelia—it is really too dangerous.”

“ I am exceedingly grateful for your kind attention to me and my suitor, my dear Mrs. Knight,” replied Miss Thorwold; “ but, if I am to be wooed at all, I would like quite as well to undergo it in the garden, as in the drawing-room—and as neither dresses, nor shoes are paid for, you know, the cost will fall, as it ought to do, upon the person who is amused, and not on the poor luckless one who causes the amusement. But, jesting apart, Mrs. Knight, the real question is, must I marry this boy at all? Is there no other way to escape? What is the worst that can happen to me if I turn restive, and say I won’t?”

“ Rather ask yourself, my dear, what is the very best that can happen to you? You know, Amelia, as well as I do, that since you first came out, and made such an immense sensation at Almack’s—which it is quite as well to recollect was just eleven years ago last April, you know, I say, perfectly well, that since that time you have been disappointed by at least a dozen men of rank and fortune, who have, one and all,

appeared to be passionately in love with you, but who, one and all, slunk off, without making any direct proposal. You might have had Hilcroft, I believe, if you had not given yourself such very high and mighty airs towards his sister—but it is no use to tell of all this now. Ask yourself, I say, what is the very best you can expect, if you let this chance escape. — In a very few months, Amelia, beautiful as you still are, you will be BETWEEN THIRTY AND FORTY, deeply in debt, without a shilling in the world, and the only near relation you have, so exceedingly out of humour, because you have not justified the brilliant hopes he had formed of your making a good match, that if it were not for my fighting your battles, my dear, I really don't believe he would ever take notice of you again. And, after all, Amelia, what is there in this young man that you can possibly object to seriously? He is decidedly one of the very handsomest lads that ever was seen, and really, as far as I am able to judge, very far from being either awkward, ignorant, or stupid; and I will not scruple

to declare, that your refusing him under all the circumstances, would be an act of such wilful and outrageous folly, that I should not think I was doing my duty, as the friend of Lord Ripley, if I did not tell you beforehand, that I could never take any notice of you afterwards."

We have been told upon high authority, that a deal of scorn may look, or be thought to look, beautiful upon a handsome brow, but I doubt if hatred could ever have the same effect, let the features which expressed it be as lovely as nature could make them. Mrs. Knight had stooped forward to take up a bottle of perfume which stood on the dressing-table, and thus escaped seeing what would have opened to her a new page in the character of her beautiful friend, had it met her eye. In any case, however, it would not have met her eye, for there was at all times so little of natural and involuntary expression in the countenance of Miss Thorwold, that there was no great danger of her ever betraying by that means, any feeling that she would wish to conceal. But a look is soon

looked, and it is probable that the beauty felt some species of relief from thus taking advantage of the absent eye of her "*friend*." When Mrs. Knight had sufficiently bedewed her handkerchief, and resumed her former position, she broke the silence which had followed her last words, by saying: "It is no good to be sulky, Amelia. I must insist upon it that you let me know what your intentions are. You cannot expect that I will continue to stay here day after day, to be bored by a parcel of people who have not, I repeat, a single idea in common with me, unless I am sure that I am doing some good by it. Will you be so obliging as to answer me?"

"Considering your high reputation for sagacious perspicuity of observation, my dear friend," replied Miss Thorwold, "it is rather extraordinary that you should doubt for an instant of my intention of accepting this enamoured swain; UNLESS, Mrs. Knight, I happened still to have some slight ground of hope that I might marry somebody I liked better. Do tell me, will you, how you should like to marry such a pretty Apollo, Belvedere, if

you will, but to *me*, duller than the fat weed that grows on Lethe's banks? How should you like to marry such a juvenile innocent, particularly if he were so much in love with you as not to leave a glimpse of hope that he would ever let you remain in peace, while he amused himself elsewhere? How would you like it, my charming friend?"

"I am half a dozen years older than you are, you know. You keep this in your head so constantly on most occasions, my dear, that it is hardly fair you should forget it on this. But let us leave wit, Amelia, and return to wisdom," continued Mrs. Knight, slightly knitting her handsome brows, "and let me tell you, once for all, that it is too late in the day for you to risk losing a good establishment for any slight hope whatever. On the contrary, it must be a very strong hope indeed, rationally strong, and of a nature to bear the examination of a rational friend as well as your own, which could justify your even pausing an instant upon such a match as this. And I confess, my dear Miss Thorwold, that I am not aware in what direction any such hope

can lie. I will not do you the great injustice to believe for a single instant that any thought of Lord William Hammond can still hold a place in your memory."

"On the contrary, my dear madam, you will be doing me great injustice if you doubt it," returned Miss Thorwold. "Circumstances over which, to use the established phrase, I certainly have no control, render it, I allow, exceedingly desirable that I should marry somebody or other, without further loss of time, as it is quite within the reach of probability that I shall be arrested if I do not. You see, my dear lady, that you cannot put the thing in a plainer light than I put it myself. Nevertheless I, who must know better than any body else can, what has passed between Lord William and myself, I, Mrs. Knight, am decidedly of opinion that there is more than hope, that there is very nearly certainty of his coming forward again; if he could but be well frightened by hearing of this new lover."

"A very desperate game to play, Miss Thorwold, I promise you," replied her admi-

rable Mentor." But let us leave calculations for the present, and devote half a moment to an impartial comparison of the two gentlemen—let me sketch their portraits, Amelia. Here, on this grassy, flower-embroidered *Mount*, stands a young man, as free from every species of vice, I conceive, as the angelic denizens of Heaven. Just look at his fine ample forehead, Amelia,—his clear, brightly beaming eye—no eye can have that sort of light in it without intelligence within. Look, too, at the freshness of that not quite unrazored lip—at the rich brown locks which curl so closely (unscathed by curling irons) round that exquisitely formed head, as to leave its fine classical outline uninjured. Look at the small ear, the well-formed nose, the short lip, the brilliant teeth, the firm broad chin, already proclaiming latent strength of character. Look at the noble stature, not exactly stalwart as yet, but as perfect in its proportions as the god-like statue to which you so jeeringly compare him; and then, fair lady, turn your eyes upon another sketch. Lord William, I confess it,

is of a more suitable age for you, being, as I think, about ten years your senior, which is more as it should be than being ten years your junior. But we must not stop here, but go on, if it so please you, to other particulars. Let me first recommend to your notice the narrow forehead,* which though incipient baldness may make it pass for high, is not so (I speak as a phrenologist) in any sense of the word; no, Amelia, it is as poor, low, pitiful, animal a forehead as ever I saw in my life. Then look at the eye, if you will so far oblige me, and tell me what you find there?"

"Love!" exclaimed Amelia, abruptly interrupting her, and with her hands energetically clasped—"love, passionate love!—such as your young Apollo could never express with his, nor ever feel either, were he to live a thousand years!"

"Were I young Alfred's mother, Amelia Thorwold, I would pray the gods that your prophecy might prove true," returned Mrs. Knight, gravely. "But let me go on, if you please. Which of the general contours of the two visages does your fancy prefer?"

The masculine, strongly marked, yet symmetrical oval of the young man, or the long, lanky, exaggerated oval of the older one? Of teeth and hair I say nothing, because it would not be fair, perhaps, to make his lordship's claim to comeliness depend upon what does not, I greatly suspect, belong to him in any sense except a commercial one. His nose certainly is as sublime as a prodigiously strong Roman outline can make it, and the moustache beneath would be faultless, if it were not too black to be altogether free from suspicion. That his person is fine, and that he stands well, I am ready to admit; but place him beside his young rival, and prefer the tapering of his well-made stays, and the military position of his shoulders and chest, to the easy grace of young Dermont, if you can. Such questions, of course, are mere matters of taste, after all."

And here Mrs. Knight ceased, and looked rather triumphantly at her fair companion, expecting her answer.

"You have drawn two portraits, Mrs. Knight, the one quite *con amore*, the other

quite the reverse, and both, in my estimation, more remarkable for their spirit than for their resemblance," said Miss Thorwold. "Permit me also to remark, that, according to my judgment, the wisest sentence in the whole harangue was that in which you state that such questions are merely matters of taste. Now, my taste, my dear friend, leads me to prefer Lord William Hammond, the darling of Almack's, the pride of the park, the glory of the drawing-room, the pet of the boudoir, and the sovereign of the opera, to young Mr. Alfred Dermont, the darling of his mamma, the pride of the Mount, the glory of its drawing-room, the pet of all the young ladies that come into it, and the sovereign of the illustrious village of Stoke. There is a corollary, you know, to your recondite axiom respecting matters of taste; namely, that of, and concerning, matters of taste there is no disputing. Wherefore I opine that we had better not sit talking here all night, in order to decide which of us is right and which wrong. Don't, however, fancy, from any

thing I may have said, that I take your remonstrance ill. On the contrary, I feel the tremendous truth of every word you have uttered upon the absolute necessity of my marrying; and, moreover, I am ready to give you my most solemn promise to be guided solely by your advice, *provided*—bear with me patiently, Mrs. Knight—provided you will give me one more chance with Lord William.”

“*I* give you another chance, Amelia? What on earth have I got to do with it? You do not mean that I am to take you back to London, do you, at this time of the year?” demanded Mrs. Knight.

“Certainly not, my dear friend,” replied Amelia. “Only invite Lord William to Crosby for a day or two. You have only to follow the bright example of these good people, and give a *fête*, in order to make the inviting him the most natural thing in the world; because, of course, you must invite others too. You know that you told me only yesterday that you must do something, and

yours may be an archery party, if you like it, at which nobody appears to so great advantage as yourself."

"I wonder whether it would be possible to get your uncle out of town for a day or two?" said Mrs. Knight, musingly.

"Most certainly you could, for the sake of an archery meeting, at which you were to be the heroine; we know that of old; and the coming to see me will be such a beautiful excuse to give my aunt, you know. By the way, I saw in the paper, or heard from somebody, somewhere or other, that Lady Ripley was worse than she had ever been; not expected to live, I think they said. How delightful it would be if I were to have you for an aunt, after all!" said Miss Thorwold, affectionately.

"And if I were to consent to this, Amelia, how should you behave to this young Dermont in the interval?" was Mrs. Knight's reply.

"In a manner that I will venture to say should satisfy you," returned Miss Thorwold.

“Well, then,” said Mrs. Knight, rising, and kissing her fair forehead, “I will now release you. Good night, my dear, I will meditate a little upon your proposal before I decide. And if I think I can get a sufficient number of people together, it is likely enough that I may accede to it; for, in truth, I hate to vex you, Amelia!”

CHAPTER II.

THE privilege of Asmodeus would often be valuable as a source of comic amusement and hearty laughter; but it would oftener still, perhaps, enable us to witness scenes, passing simultaneously under the same roof, which might give occasion to a good deal of sober thinking on the subject of human blundering and short-sightedness. Moreover it would give us a curious insight into the varieties of human hearts and human actions, and teach us to feel that, despite the apparent similarity of our organisation, the value of a human being as a moral and intelligent agent may vary from a very elevated place in the graduated chain of created beings, to one, in

some respects, a good deal lower than that of a cabbage.

It was in a small, but very neat little apartment, immediately over that in which Mrs. Knight and Miss Thorwold held the consultation related in the last chapter, that Julia Drummond retired to the immense blessing of solitude, after passing a day of such severe moral exertion as made her feel exhausted in body, as well as worn and bruised in spirit. She had blundered too, poor little girl, in fancying that unless she kept a most watchful guard over her looks and actions, she should betray the heavy secret of her heart; whereas, if she had but known how very little any body thought about her and her feelings, she might have suffered her hands to tremble, her colour to change, and her eyes to fill with tears, without giving herself the trouble of trying to get out of sight, or of pretending to have a violent cold in the head, or performing any of the other devices by which she had so painfully laboured to conceal what it had never entered any body's head to find out.

There was no sofa in Julia's room, but there was an easy chair, which had been permitted to take up its quarters there from the time that Mrs. Dermont had got tired of seeing it in her own room, and into this chair Julia threw herself (her door having first been carefully locked), and indulged in a flood of tears, absolutely luxurious from the freedom from all restraint with which she permitted them to flow. But soon this luxury was changed for self-reproach. Was it not already a sin to feel for Alfred what she still did feel for him? She remembered his assiduous attentions, his tender whisperings to the thrice happy object of his choice, and she remembered too,—no, she did not remember, she still saw before her eyes the beautiful, yielding, bashful look with which Miss Thorwold had dropped her eyes upon the carpet as she listened to him. Could they be more completely united if the marriage ceremony had already passed between them? How great, then, was the sin of feeling for Alfred what she still felt for him!

And then Julia rose from her chair, and

kneelt before it, and prayed for power to conquer all that was sinful in her attachment to her early friend. And, certainly, her prayers seemed to be attended by a good effect, for she gradually became calm, composed, and peaceful. And then she prayed again for blessings on his head, and on the head of his chosen wife also. And these prayers were repeated again when she laid herself down to sleep; and then Asmodeus, if he had been upon the alert, would have seen a great difference between the expression in her innocent young face and that of the beautiful lady in the pink room on the floor below. And, during the hours which followed, their condition was very different too, for Julia slept sweetly, whereas Miss Thorwold hardly slept at all till the morning, and then the contrasts between them was equally great; for Julia, the heavy languor of the night before no longer predominating over every other feeling, was enjoying the delicious freshness of the morning air in the park, while Amelia lay flushed, and feverish, in her carefully closed apartment, starting in unquiet dreams, which

carried her into scenes as little like the sylvan solitudes which greeted the open eyes of Julia as possible.

In another quarter of the house was Alfred, exulting in the fond belief that his passion was returned by the divine Amelia, and no more conscious of the devoted and unbounded love of Julia, than of the existence of all the vehement passions lurking in the heart of her rival. And there were the well-pleased parents congratulating each other, both pompously and affectionately, on the charming prospect of perfect happiness which had opened before their darling son, by a union with a young lady whose distinguished situation in society, as well as her enchanting personal qualities, rendered her so particularly desirable a daughter-in-law. And Mr. and Mrs. Stephens uttering to each other, till they dropt asleep, the very tenderest expressions possible, while the gentleman was thinking that he wished he had happened to meet Miss Verepoint before his marriage, not only because she was richer, but also because she was a good deal more

agreeable to him than his wife; and the lady was resolving, as it was evident Mr. Marsh was peculiarly shy, that she would give him sufficient encouragement by the condescending kindness of her manners, to enable him thoroughly to enjoy her conversation, which would not only be agreeable during the present visit, but as long as they remained neighbours together in the country, which might, for any thing she knew to the contrary, be all their lives.

As to Miss Celestina, though there might be a little self-delusion perceptible, no other sort of deception could have been discovered by the most comprehensive eye that ever penetrated into the secrets of a lady's bower. For the most unreflecting observer would, at the first glance, have guessed, that whatever portions of her hours of retirement could be spared from sleep, must be employed precisely as they were employed on her retiring to her bed-room on the night in question. Mrs. Dermont, before retiring for the night, had made a civil apology for being obliged to put her into a bachelor's room, and the

young lady, naturally wishing to discover, if possible, who was the bachelor who had occupied it last, spent some few minutes after she had shut herself in, endeavouring to discover, by opening table drawers, glass drawers, and such like repositories, some carelessly left letter or card which might enlighten her. But, this examination finished, she applied herself to what must ever be such a young lady's natural occupation at such an hour. She re-examined and re-arranged various suits, both for morning and evening, carefully twisting and twitching into a state of perfection a variety of artificial flowers, not quite new. She tried on a bewitching little construction composed of net, ribbon, and roses, with which she purposed to cover a small portion of her head on the following morning; and then she sat down, and put each of her beloved lank ringlets into a separate piece of paper, till her head was bristling from side to side with triangular horns, which it might have grieved a pitying heart to know was prepared as a pillow for an enemy. And then she, too, went to bed, and slept as

soundly as her curling-papers, and her hopes and fears for the morrow would let her; all of which was so very natural, that seeing it with the eyes could scarcely be considered as making a discovery. The only two apartments between which there was any real sympathy, were those of George Marsh and Charlotte Verepoint; for he went to sleep thinking of her, and she went to sleep thinking of him.

On the following morning, exactly at ten o'clock, Alfred stood ready at the door of the breakfast-room, with a bouquet of the very choicest flowers from the green-house, and having passed about twenty minutes at that station diversifying the interval by occasional little rambles to the foot of the staircase, he was at length rewarded by placing it in the hand of Miss Thorwold, who received it with a smile which did honour to the fidelity with which it was evident she intended to keep her parting promise to Mrs. Knight.

All the rest of the party were already seated, which made his leading her to one

of two chairs left unoccupied, and the seating himself in another next her, an act of such very particular attention, that most of the company exchanged looks with each other. The delicate bloom upon the cheeks of Miss Thorwold, however, was neither increased nor diminished by the accident; but Alfred became very red, and Julia, though looking the picture of quiet composure, very pale.

There was one other flower, besides the pink roses in Celestina's cap, which might have told tales at that breakfast, if any body had seen the lady for whom it had been gathered, receive it from the gentleman who had gathered it. This flower, though not selected from the reserved treasures of the green-house, was very pretty and very sweet, being a white moss rose bud, and it is possible that George Marsh thought it looked so like Charlotte Verepoint that it ought to belong to her; but why Charlotte Verepoint looked so very much as if she intended to refuse it at first, and blushed so violently

when she did receive it at last, who can tell? There was nobody, however, who could set about guessing, for neither the offering nor the acceptance were seen by any one.

“What lovely flowers!” exclaimed Mrs. Stephens, fixing her eyes on the splendid bouquet which Miss Thorwold had laid beside her plate. The little white rose-bud did not attract her attention; it was, in fact, pretty nearly out of sight, having been hastily, but rather carefully withal, laid exactly where the giver wished to have it, namely, beneath the folding of the robe that was crossed over the little heiress’s bosom.

“I have not seen such flowers this year. I do humbly beg and petition that to-morrow morning some gentleman will have pity and compassion on my longing desire for a few flowers. I dare not ask you, Liebe, for I know we are quizzed a little already for some of our conjugalities. I think I must make you, Mr. Marsh, the squire of my nosegays. Will you accept the office?” added Mrs. Stephens, stooping forward playfully to look

at him, for not only Miss Verepoint, but Celestina was seated between them. And then, indeed, she began to be seriously vexed at his absence of mind; for though it seemed almost impossible that he should not have heard her, he continued breaking the shell of an egg as resolutely as if he had been stone deaf.

Celestina felt ready to laugh, but she thought better of it, and recollecting that the Stephens's had had a gentleman staying with them on the day of the fête, determined to try if she could not manage to run up a friendship with the lady which might lead to her being asked to stay at their house also. With this view she turned towards Mrs. Stephens, and displaying her large teeth from ear to ear, said, with a vast deal of charming vivacity, "It is no good, my dear Mrs. Stephens, to attempt converting my poor brother George into an ordinary mortal. I dare say that at this moment he is in deep meditation upon some German poet or other. I assure you that he is the most tiresome creature in existence.

I wish you would appoint me to be your flower gatherer instead. Do you know there is nothing in the world I delight in so much as devoting myself to young married women. I always think they are so *interesting*, and so very agreeable."

It would have been difficult for any person, who was not a particularly literary or scientific character, to have made a speech to Mrs. Stephens, which would have delighted her so much. *A young married woman!* It was so precisely the light in which she liked to be considered—and there was always something so *interesting* in a young married woman's having a young single friend devotedly attached to her! She immediately, spontaneously, instinctively, made up her mind to receive it as an incontrovertible fact, that Celestina Marsh was a very young girl indeed, and also that it was essential to the happiness of both that they should become intimate, and perfectly confidential friends.

To some young wives, as passionately fond of their husbands as Mrs. Stephens was of

hers, (being moreover of that tenderly affectionate temperament which makes an incessantly demonstrative return of fondness absolutely necessary to peace of mind) the idea of so very intimate a young female friend might suggest the agonising idea of jealousy. And certain it is, that had such a passion found entrance into her heart, the ardent qualities of her head would have caused it to rage with more than ordinary vehemence. But no thought connected with jealousy ever occurred to her, while contemplating their future intimacy.

It is not very easy to explain the precise condition of mind which led, in the case of Mrs. Stephens, to this happy state of confidence, because the only phrase which suggests itself for the purpose is so lamentably matter-of-fact. But it is weakness in an historian to shrink from stating motives which his accurate and acute investigations have made obvious to him, and I will, therefore, in plain language observe, that Mrs. Stephens was not jealous of Mr. Stephens, because her mind was strengthened by the pro-

found conviction that Mr. Stephens DARED NOT give her cause.

Such being the state of feeling between the two ladies thus pleasantly seated together at the Dermont breakfast-table, the rapid progress of conversation between them may be easily imagined.

As to the rest of the party, and how they got on together, it may be left to the sagacity of the reader to imagine, but it may not be superfluous to observe, that Mrs. Knight, though apparently listening with very flattering attention to all the colonel's observations on the bread, butter, marmalade, hams, and grills, peculiar to the Mount, ceased not to observe the conduct of her beautiful *protégée*; and, however angry she had been during the conversation of the preceding night, at the difficulties that young lady seemed disposed to discover in the way of the connexion so "providentially" thrown in her path, she could not but acknowledge that she now demonstrated a most laudable adherence to the promise with which they had parted. Mrs. Knight, indeed, was very

wrong, and showed by no means a profound discrimination of character in supposing that Miss Thorwold was, in the least degree, insensible to the advantages of the marriage now likely to be proposed to her ; for Mrs. Knight herself was far from being equally aware of their importance. It would, indeed, have been difficult for any person less thoroughly acquainted with this beautiful young woman than her own heart, to believe that she was not only quite indifferent to the great personal attractions of the young man beside her, but so greatly disposed to ridicule every word he uttered, and every movement he made, that nothing that the stern resolution which she had formed to marry him, if Lord William Hammond could not be persuaded to marry her, could have enabled her to check her inclination to laugh. As it was, however, nobody, not even the young man himself, nay, not even his adoring parents, could wish for any thing more softly sweet, more bashfully beautiful, more tenderly timid, than the demeanour of Amelia.

“ I am afraid that we must not venture to

think of groves and gardens during the early hours of the day," said Alfred, "there are faces which should not only be guarded from the winds of Heaven, but even from its sunny smiles—we never think that the tint upon a peach can grow too ruddy, but there are cheeks which, in their tender ripeness, have so precisely reached perfection, that the very slightest change might cause every looker-on to put on mourning."

"Are there?" replied Miss Thorwold, turning her head towards him, and, for the fraction of a second, permitting her expressive eyes to rest upon his. "But do you not think," she added, in a low voice, "that there are moods and moments which are apt to make every body forget every thing?"

"Do I?" he returned in the lowest of all audible whispers. "Do I?"—And then it was his turn to look at her—but if he hoped thereby to see her beautiful eyes, he was disappointed, for they were as earnestly fixed upon the nosegay he had given her, and which she had just taken off the table, as if she had been about to draw it.

No words which could by possibility have

been spoken by either, could have equalled in eloquence the silence which followed; but when this had lasted just long enough, Amelia said, with the air of a person endeavouring to rouse himself from a deep and dangerous reverie, "I believe you have some very pretty woodland scenery in this neighbourhood, have you not?"

It was not, of course, till he had relieved his over-charged heart, by a deep sigh, that Alfred could answer at all, but having done so, he replied, "I have thought it so, formerly—yes, certainly, I have always thought our copses and mossy dells supremely beautiful—but I begin to suspect that such an epithet can properly belong but to one object in nature. Such scenery, however, as we have, Miss Thorwold, you might safely, I think, venture to look at, notwithstanding the brightness of the day, if you would not fear to trust yourself to my driving. My mother has the safest little carriage in the world, with a pair of ponies generally driven by a miniature postilion of twelve years old. Do you think you could venture to let me drive you?"

“Why, as far as safety of life and limb is concerned,” she replied with an enchanting smile, “I certainly think I could—but—” and there she stopped.

“But what?” cried Alfred, eagerly, and taking the nosegay out of her hand, in order to cut off the thorns from a delicate blush-rose which made part of it; “but what—what else can you fear?”

Again Miss Thorwold’s eyes were fixed upon his face, but he felt their flash precisely as a flash of lightning, which, ere one can say ’tis here, is gone. “But what?” he repeated, replacing the nosegay in her hand, and bending himself towards her, over it, as if wishing to mention something remarkable which he had noticed among the flowers. “Tell me!”

“I am quite sure that it is needless,” she replied, “I am quite sure that you must know what I mean.” And having said this, she raised the nosegay to her face, concealing every part of it save the eyes, which she permitted to wander round the table, and to pause, for half an instant, on Mrs. Stephens and Miss Marsh, who at that moment, were

conversing earnestly, and in whispers, accompanied by that species of laugh which, with unskilful people, is apt to accompany every attempt at quizzing.

"Nonsense!" whispered Alfred, drawing a faded leaf from the nosegay.

"Indisputable," re-whispered Miss Thorwold, shaking her head.

"And will you be so influenced?" said he, in an accent of reproach.

"Impossible to help it!" she returned, with a gentle sigh.

"Damnation!" muttered Alfred.

"Fye, fye," murmured Amelia.

"But you cannot suppose I can live and endure this?" said the gentleman, again employing himself in correcting some error in the nosegay, and knitting his brows the while very savagely.

"It is not my fault, you know," returned the lady, in accents of angelic meekness; "it is very unfair that you should be angry with me."

"Angry! *Angry!* ANGRY!" he repeated at intervals, in various accents, but always in

a whisper, and accompanied by the most persevering criticism of the flowers, which the lady as perseveringly continued to hold before her face.

A little more of the same species of conversation occupied the remainder of the time that Mrs. Dermont thought proper to bestow upon the breakfast. There was indeed, something so very interesting in the manner in which her beloved son was employing himself, that nothing but the consciousness that the servants would think it odd if they sat any longer, could have given her courage to interrupt it.

She remembered too that his conversation might be renewed over the books of beauty on the drawing-room table, or over the piano-forte, or over any worsted-work or purse-knitting upon which Miss Thorwold might happen to be employed; and, therefore, having thought about it three times, she got up at last, saying that, "She hoped every body would employ themselves just as they liked till luncheon time, after which the close carriage and the park phaeton, together with

one or two saddle-horses, would come round, in case any of the party should like to explore."

This announcement, which was made in Mrs. Dermont's most demure and lady-like manner, caused the eyes of Mrs. Knight and Miss Thorwold to meet. Had any third party intercepted these glances, they would have made nothing of them, but Miss Thorwold understood perfectly well that Mrs. Knight's eyes said, "You had better think twice, my dear, before you finally reject the mistress-ship of those horses and carriages;" and Mrs. Knight was equally well aware that Miss Thorwold's eyes replied, "I know it as well as you do." And then the party began to separate; Mrs. Stephens put her arm through that of Celestina, and invited her into her bed-room. The colonel proposed to Mr. Stephens a walk round the home pastures, for the purpose of looking at some prodigiously beautiful sheep. Mrs. Dermont herself observed that she always gave an hour or two to her worsted-work in the drawing-room; Miss Verepoint replied

to the observation, by saying that she would fetch her knitting and join her ; and when these two industrious ladies reached that apartment, they found George Marsh there, earnestly engaged in examining the recondite pages of an annual.

“Can you play billiards?” cried Alfred, eagerly addressing Miss Thorwold, as she was preparing to follow the other ladies out of the room.

“Oh no ! I don’t know the game at all,” replied the beauty, with the very sweetest of smiles, and pausing a moment before she made her exit, for the purpose of buttoning her lemon-coloured glove with the greater convenience.

“Let me teach you, then ! I will make you a proficient in half a dozen lessons ! I will indeed. Oh ! do let me teach you !”

It was certainly quite true that Miss Thorwold knew little or nothing about the game of billiards ; but, nevertheless, it was at least equally true that she had been taking lessons from the age of seventeen to the present time, with the most extraordinary

perseverance, whenever she happened to be in a house with a billiard-table, and young men to act as her instructors.

It may indeed be observed, and the observation is of very general application, that young ladies, as beautiful as Miss Thorwold, if they move in that station of life wherein billiard-tables are considered as necessary household furniture, have wonderfully great advantages as to the obtaining lessons in this interesting game; and the study is often attended with great advantage. Sometimes, from natural aptitude, a fair creature will learn to use a mace as deftly as a marker his cue; but much oftener a lucky hazard may be found by seeming chance, than real skill, by which a good deal may be pocketed beside the balls, and a good deal won and lost, beside the bets. As far as this went, Miss Thorwold knew the game exceedingly well, and though, on the whole, she had not as yet won much by it, she always seemed ready to improve herself by new lessons.

There are, however, always a few pre-

liminaries to be settled first, because there are but few young ladies (though now and then an exception may be found) who choose to walk off, in the first instance, tête-à-tête with one of the professors. Accidents, of course, will occur afterwards, when games get particularly interesting, and lookers on get tired, notwithstanding their proverbial advantages in point of understanding what they see, and then the players cannot help themselves, but must submit, like all other mortals, to what is inevitable. But Miss Thorwold had never in her life set off for a billiard-room tête-à-tête with her master, except, perhaps, in the house of her very particular friend, Mrs. Knight, who was the best good creature in the world, and the last person who would suffer any thing to be said that had a single particle of ill-nature in it.

But she was not in Mrs. Knight's house now, a fact which the young master who now offered himself, was not the least likely to make her forget, and she, therefore, very properly shook her head, raising her delicate

eye-brows, however, at the same time, in a manner which nicely expressed the difference between being displeased that such a proposition should be made at all, and being surprised that the proposer did not perceive the impossibility of their going alone.

Alfred, notwithstanding the youthful appearance of his moustache, understood her perfectly, and darting towards a window through which Julia was now looking out upon the lawn, he caught her by the hand, exclaiming, "Julia ! Julia Drummond ! Do make Miss Thorwold go into the billiard-room with us ! Is it not a particularly pleasant morning-room, Julia ? Do tell her, will you, what a delightful amusement it is ?"

The idea of being the third in such a party was certainly not very agreeable to poor Julia, but she was very much in earnest to gain the affection of the beautiful Amelia. She wished for nothing so much as to be her useful and respected friend through life, and how could she find a

better opportunity to begin? Not, however, that she would have refused, had the case been otherwise; but as it was, she gave a nod of willing acquiescence to Alfred, and approaching Miss Thôrworld, with a very sweet smile, said, "I hope you will not refuse our petition, Miss Thorwold. Do pray come. I am quite sure it will amuse you."

Among the subjects to which Miss Thorwold had paid particular attention, and which she really did understand exceedingly well, the promise of beauty in a young female face was one. The half-blown beauty of Julia Drummond had struck her on the day of the fête, and then too, she fancied that she had seen symptoms of more admiration and attention on the part of Alfred, than she thought desirable in a young man whom she intended to keep in readiness to marry herself, if circumstances should make it desirable.

Nothing (unless it happened to be ugly) could be less like her own finished and exquisitely decorated loveliness than the little simple figure which now approached.

It is quite true that Julia, though so nearly seventeen, was still too youthful in appearance to be criticised as a beautiful woman; but young ladies of Miss Thorwold's age and pretensions are among the first to overlook such a defect; they may not, indeed, allow that they do so. *Chit, child, brat, and baby-face*, being the appellations most frequently bestowed upon them; but it cannot be said that in their hearts, these full-grown young ladies treat this crudeness of age severely, inasmuch as, for the most part, they would willingly consent, if the choice were offered, to exchange the downward for the upward period of existence.

At any rate, it is certain that when Julia, in her sober-coloured silk morning frock, with no ornament save a neatly stitched cambric collar and cuffs; her black hair smoothly parted, and its curling ends kept in order by her pretty little ears; her miniature feet in the very same habiliments with which they had carried her up hill and down dale, before breakfast; her delicate little hands

without a single ring to set off their beauty, and with nothing better than a tiny black silk mitten by way of a glove. When Julia, under all these manifold disadvantages approached her with her gentle smile and her urgent request that she would go to the billiard-room, Miss Thorwold saw as plainly as the most accomplished artist could have done, that there was in that cream-coloured skin, and those magnificent black eyes, wherewithal to throw into hopeless shade ninety-nine out of every hundred women who approached her.

For some reason or other, it would seem difficult to say what, Miss Thorwold seemed exceedingly disposed to dislike Julia. She did not only look ridiculously young for a girl that was brought into company at all, but she looked so stupidly innocent also, that it was impossible not to see that she would be odious by way of a companion. Nevertheless, Miss Thorwold immediately accepted her invitation, and not only condescended to take her arm without waiting for an invitation, but actually entered into

conversation with her, quite as if they had been equals.

"I should not be the least surprised," thought Miss Thorwold, as they crossed the hall, "if this sensitive miss, who turns from red to white, and from white to red every moment, I should not be at all surprised if she were making ready to fall violently in love with Alfred Dermont herself. The boy is certainly handsome enough to turn such a heart as that, and decidedly much too handsome to be suffered to return any such mawkish passion. At any rate, I will take care that he shall not commit such folly, if only from a generous feeling of compassion;—not to mention that the doing so will enable me to endure the suspense in which I am doomed to live for some time to come, with greater patience, for it will amuse me excessively."

CHAPTER III.

EITHER by some exceedingly good management on the part of Mr. Marsh, or a little imperceptible manœuvring on that of Miss Verepoint, or else from an unusually bright idea being suggested to Mrs. Dermont, by seeing the young gentleman point out something in one of the volumes lying on the table, to the notice of the young lady, from one or other of these causes, Mrs. Dermont was induced to ask Mr. Marsh if he thought he could find something to read to them.

Mr. Marsh threw an inquiring glance towards Charlotte, and perceiving nothing in her looks that he could interpret into an objection to the proposal, he replied that he

thought it not unlikely that he might, for that there was abundant variety before them.

"That will be very pleasant, will it not Miss Verepoint?" said Mrs. Dermont, looking innocently at her blushing face.

"I shall like it very much," replied the young lady. And a book was accordingly found, the reading of which, and the conversation to which it led, occupied the trio till luncheon time.

We need not follow the colonel, and the newly-made country gentleman, Mr. Stephens, in their agrarian ramble, for it is easy to guess the nature of their talk. Not even the remarkable partiality of the Socinian churchman for metaphysical subjects could prevent him from wishing to take his place among the established squirarchy of the county, and he exerted himself to the utmost to be agreeable in that line.

Mrs. Knight had retired, as was her habit, to the soothing solitude of her own apartment. She was a great letter writer, and a great novel reader, and her hours of solitude were about equally divided, let her be where

she would, between these two occupations. On the present occasion she was employed in writing to Lord William Hammond and Lord Ripley.

In the tête-à-tête established in the apartment of Mrs. Stephens there was every appearance of a very close and intimate friendship being the result. It cannot be supposed that the little work upon which Mrs. Stephens so dearly loved to employ herself, had been omitted in her packing up. No, it all lay ready in a little table drawer, which table had already been drawn pleasantly near a window that looked out upon the lawn.

Before she descended to the breakfast-room she had arranged a chair and a foot-stool at this little table to await her return; and as she had carefully placed her little work, and her gold thimble, her mother-of-pearl handled scissors, and her rosewood cotton box upon it, the housemaids had treated it with proper respect, and left it scrupulously untouched till her return.

“You won’t mind my going on with my little work, dear, will you?” said Mrs. Ste-

phens, approaching the interesting little repository, and placing herself in the ready chair, carefully arranging the footstool for her own accommodation. "Young as you are, I suppose you will guess what I am about?"

"Oh! I shall be so delighted to watch you!" exclaimed Celestina, curiously eyeing the delicate fabric, as if she had never seen such little work before.

"Dear girl! That is so natural! Bring a chair, Celestina; I really must call you Celestina, it is such an excessively pretty name, bring a chair, my dear, and I will show you all about it."

"Thank you a thousand times, my dear Mrs. Stephens! You are exactly the person I have always wished for as a friend ever since I was grown up! I know I shall love you better than any body I ever saw before."

"Love me! Oh! Celestina. It is almost profanation to use that word when speaking of friendship! If I grow to like you as much as I feel certain I shall do, I shall never let you have any rest till you know what that dear word really means."

“Oh! Mrs. Stephens! What do you mean?” cried Celestina, hiding her face with both hands. “What CAN you mean?”

“Mean, my dear girl? What should I mean, but that I shall not be contented till I see you as happy as myself?”

“You dear, kind creature! What a heart you have!” replied Celestina, greatly touched. “How few people there are who, when they are perfectly happy themselves, care a far-thing about the happiness of others! I own, my dear friend, that I do sometimes think—I really at times cannot help thinking that I have a heart capable of appreciating the blessings of domestic life. But this is a subject, you know, upon which it is impossible for any girl to speak to her brother. And my poor heart often feels as if it were bursting. For, excepting Miss Jane Wilkins, who is living now with her grandmother in Wales, I have not a single human being to whom I could dare to express what I feel.”

“Poor dear girl! But, never mind, Celestina; we may often contrive to get a little quiet talk together when Stephens is going

over his fields. You do not keep a carriage, I believe, do you?"

"No, we do not," replied Miss Marsh, with a tone and look that expressed considerable indignation ; " my brother is so excessively careful of his money, that he would let me walk, I believe, all the days of my life before he would think of getting a carriage and horses for me. I am sure if you were to see our stables and coach-house, you would perceive that the Tremayne Marshes have not been used to live in the sort of style that he does now."

" Really! Your brother's weakness is love of money then, is it? Every body, they say, has some particular weakness or other belonging to him, and the love of money may not perhaps be the worst ; though to be sure there is nothing very poetical in it. Very stingy is he?"

" I don't mean absolutely to say that he is stingy in every thing," replied Celestina, with a slight heightening of her usual bloom ; " but the fact is that he keeps neither carriage nor horses, and that his ancestors did

keep both. However, I don't wish to prejudice *you* against him, my dearest Mrs. Stephens. He is very bookish, and very clever indeed; and perhaps he is only saving to buy a great library, you know, or something of that sort. But I own I cannot help thinking sometimes that his living so very economically as he does, must be a great disadvantage to me, in the way of marrying you know, for I don't believe there are many men who ever like to venture upon making an offer unless they see some reason to think that the woman will have something."

"Oh no, my dear; you are quite mistaken there; I had thirty thousand pounds, you know, therefore I am a tolerably good judge, and I do assure you, upon my word of honour, that I don't believe my William ever thought of it for a single moment when he proposed to me; nay, I am by no means quite sure that he knew of it. No, Celestina, dear! money *is* of consequence, because it is impossible to live in a good style, and have every thing comfortable about one, without

it ; but as to the power by which woman attracts man, and wins him to herself, trust me, money has nothing to do with it !”

“ I could listen to you for ever !” exclaimed Celestina, warmly, “ I don’t think I ever met any one who seemed to possess so much real warmth of heart, and eloquence of language, as you do.”

“ That is, I believe, what is generally said of me,” replied Mrs. Stephens, with unaffected frankness, “ but I don’t like you the less, dear, for finding it out. And now, my dear Celestina, I want to talk to you a little about your heart ; you are quite a young creature as yet, I know, yet still I cannot help thinking, dear, that with your eyes you must have done some little mischief before now.”

On hearing these words the eyes of Celestina rolled heavenward, upon which Mrs. Stephens naturally became more sensible of their power than ever, and said : “ Come, come, my dear, I must have a full confession, I must indeed, and who knows but I may be useful ? ‘ The course of true love never did’—

I need not finish the quotation—but thus much I will say to encourage your confidence. The warmth of my own feelings leads me to sympathise, more than most young married women with the feelings of others, and there is a rapidity of thought, and an activity of imagination about me, I believe, which can hardly fail, I think, to make me a useful, as well as an indulgent friend to such a truly interesting girl as yourself.”

Celestina rose from her chair, threw her arms round Mrs. Stephens, and kissed her.

“It really does seem to me as if my meeting you here were providential!” she exclaimed, with strong demonstrations of sensibility; “I must only take care not to love you too well! Oh! if there were any thing I could do—any work—any satin stitch; my heart longs to prove itself worthy of yours, and if you will but let me come and stay with you for a little while, now and then, I shall be the happiest girl in the world!”

“Never fear about that, my dear,” replied Mrs. Stephens, nodding her head, “I am seldom or never deceived in people, and I see

as plainly as possible that we shall suit one another. Luckily too, I really think I shall grow to like that odd brother of yours, with all his faults. I shall tell William to cultivate the acquaintance. A clever man who thinks about books, a little in our own way, you know, is really worth something in such a neighbourhood as this. I don't intend to mind his absence; it rather amuses me than not, and I have no doubt we shall be a great deal together, and do beautifully. I don't think you will ever find my house as dull as this. It is quite clear that they have not the slightest touch of literature among them; it is horribly dull, my dear, isn't it?"

Celestina confessed that without her she should think it rather dull, certainly, and then added, "I wonder if we shall have any of the officers at dinner here to-day; do you think we shall, Mrs. Stephens?"

"Upon my word, my dear, I can't tell; but thus much I will say, that it will be an abominable shame if there are not, with such a girl as you are staying in the house," replied the matron, with great animation. The

conversation did not stop here, but continued without interruption till the great bell of the Mount rang for luncheon, and then Mrs. Stephens exclaimed: "Dear me! how the time does fly with this dear little work, and such a companion as you are, Celestina. However, I shall not be sorry to get some luncheon, for I begin to feel that I have been talking a good deal, and that always makes one hungry. I hope they will let us have that capital veal pie again, it was so particularly well seasoned."

* * * * *

The series of lessons which were going on in the billiard-room did not last quite so long, though Alfred did all that a man of twenty could do to prolong them; and, for some time, Miss Thorwold condescended to proceed very patiently through all the pretty manœuverings usually performed on such occasions. She held her mace as awkwardly as Alfred himself could have desired, and the necessity of placing it properly within her taper fingers, was so obvious, that she submitted to it again and again. Neither did

she know at all how to stand, or in what angle to hold her beautifully rounded arm; all of which was explained to her by her animated instructor, with a degree of perseverance and zeal that must have been quite edifying to Julia, whose duties as marker were not such as to occupy much of her time; the strokes made, telling more upon poor Alfred's heart than upon the balls.

That Miss Thorwold should get weary of the sport before he did, was natural enough, seeing that she had gone through precisely the same routine many scores of times, while to him it was perfectly new. Indeed, it is highly probable that, notwithstanding all her promises to Mrs. Knight, and her own resolution, which, to do her justice, was by no means wanting in fixedness of purpose, it is very highly probable that, notwithstanding all this, her patience would not have held out quite so long as it did, had not her almost blunted purpose been whetted by a trifling accident which occurred after they had been engaged at the play for about half an hour. Miss Thorwold, either to vary

the sport, or because she was really too weary of it, and was growing spiteful, contrived, somehow or other, so to manage her mace as to bring it with a pretty sharp blow against Alfred's forehead. It had, in truth, hit his eye, and by an action that was probably involuntary, he raised his hand, and held it before the watery eye for a minute or two. Miss Thorwold was beginning to say every thing that was prettiest on the occasion, when her glance chanced to rest upon the face of Julia, which was not only as pale as death, but expressed, in every speaking lineament, a trembling anxiety, which, perhaps, produced the greater effect from the contrast it offered to the feelings of the fair observer.

“So, so, so!” exclaimed the beauty to her own heart, “that is the state of the case, is it? And perhaps, my pretty miss, you fancy that upon the strength of your youth, and your cream-coloured skin, you may run a race with me, and come in winner at last? We will see about that, little bright eyes. At any rate, I may thank you for one thing.

Your modest ambition will keep me awake. There will be considerably more interest now, in rivetting the chains round the heart of our Adonis."

And then the fair creature, in a voice of tender pity exclaimed, "Oh! Mr. Dermont! I am so sorry, so very sorry! For Heaven's sake, let me know that your eye is not hurt! Let me see your eye, Alfred! Mr. Dermont! Let me see your eye!"

Had the young man possessed as many eyes as Argus, he would willingly have lost them one by one, save the last, which must be kept as long as life endured, that he might gaze upon her beauty; but, except that last, he would joyfully have lost them all, one by one, so that at each misfortune he might have heard the same heavenly accents, lamenting it. And when this welcome pain was passed, and over, Amelia kept true to the promise she had thus pledged to herself, and again ran through all the fascinating changes of billiard-table manœuverings with such skill and animation, that a far duller

eye than hers might have perceived that the doomed youth was fifty times more violently in love with her, when at length she stopped, declaring that she really had not strength to play any more, than when they had entered the room.

“What will you do then till luncheon time?” said Alfred, pulling out his watch; “It wants more than an hour to it. Shall we go into the drawing-room, and see what they are about there?”

“A very pretty proposal,” replied Amelia, taking hold of a lock of her beautiful hair, which had strayed from under her comb, and pulling it over her shoulder, till the whole of its shining length was displayed to view. “A very pretty proposal, Mr. Alfred, indeed! I should like to know what your good mother would think of me, were I to appear before her in this condition. Instead of going into the drawing-room, I must beg that you will look out to see if the coast is clear for me through the hall. Upon my honour, I will never play with you again, if

you do not take care that I get a free passage to my own room without encountering the eye of any human being."

Alfred looked at her with eyes which said plainly enough, considering his age, that so as he might but see her himself, he would willingly guard her from the approach of every other eye—and then opening the door, and looking out for a moment, he returned to tell her that all was safe, if indeed, she were determined to go.

"If! Are you not the most unreasonable of men?" said she.

"Are you not an angel, and no woman?" he murmured in return, as she passed through the door that he held open for her. She smiled a sort of soft reproachful smile, shook her head, and passed on, with a pretty measured step as long as she knew herself to be within sight of the door, where she felt, with tolerable certainty, that the young man lingered; but having turned out of sight to mount the stairs, she ran up them with a speed of movement by no means very usual to her, and rushing into the room of Mrs.

Knight, threw herself upon the sofa at the foot of the bed, with the air of a person too much overcome by vexation and fatigue to have strength to speak.

“What is the matter, Amelia?” said Mrs. Knight, raising her eyes from her writing-desk, where she had been both reading and writing letters. “You look as if you had not an hour of life left in you.”

“Tell me, my dear friend,” said Amelia, her eyes closed, and her lips moving, as it seemed, with difficulty to give utterance to her words—“tell me if you think women do ever actually die of fatigue when boys make love to them? Because, my dear, if such a thing can happen, it certainly will happen in my case. You have no idea, Mrs. Knight! I give you my honour, that I have no power of expressing the complete exhaustion of strength and spirits which I feel at this moment.”

“At any rate, Amelia, I hope that anticipated disappointment has no share in this depression?” replied her friend. “I tell you fairly, Amelia, that I, who am not in love

with Lord William Hammond, become more and more convinced, as I meditate upon all I have heard and all I have seen of him, that unless you can contrive to persuade him that somebody or other, a cousin in the Highlands, or in the moon, intends to leave you a fortune—unless you can get some such notion as this into his head, he never, never, never will become your husband.”

All traces of languor and fatigue vanished from the features of Miss Thorwold, as she listened to this prediction. Nevertheless she remained silent, till her friend roused her from the reverie into which she appeared to have fallen, by saying: “I presume, by your silence, that you do not agree with me, Miss Thorwold?”

“Why alter the usual interpretation given to silence?” returned Amelia. “But there is one point, at least, my amiable Mrs. Knight, upon which I may have the satisfaction of setting your heart at ease. Nothing can be less like doubt or vacillation than the resolute adoration of Mr. Alfred Dermont. All the satisfaction which this fact can afford

to either of us, we may venture to enjoy freely. And I *have* endured it all, during I know not how many dreadful hours, with the resolution and patience of a martyr! I have endured it, Mrs. Knight, at your request, and, as I hope you remember, upon the faith of a positive promise received from you. I shall consider myself exceedingly ill-used, if, instead of performing this promise, you take to speculating upon the possible result of keeping it."

"It is not a practice with me to break my promises, Miss Thorwold," replied her friend, gravely; "and you must give me leave to say that, considering every thing, it would be much better if you were not quite so much disposed to quarrel with every thing I say and do. My regard for you is very sincere, certainly; but you tax it severely, my dear."

There was a long letter lying open on Mrs. Knight's writing-desk, the characters of which were familiar to the younger lady, and she smiled slightly as she permitted her eyes to rest upon it for a moment. Mrs.

Knight coloured, and folding up the despatch, placed it under the lid of the desk. It is probable that the two ladies understood each other sufficiently well without speaking, for, after a short silence, Mrs. Knight resumed the conversation, much as she might have done if the interval had been employed in the most candid expression of them.

“We are both of us always wrong, Amelia,” she said, “when we suffer the little asperities of temper to which all human beings are liable, to disturb the harmony of our intercourse. Every body agrees that unreserved confidence is the best, and, indeed, the only enduring foundation for real friendship; and it is impossible to deny that there is a good deal of *that* between us. You must perceive that I take little or no pains to conceal my secrets from you, and I have every reason in the world to believe that I am as well acquainted with your heart as you are with mine. Therefore, my dear, we are, and must be friends, unless we are very great fools indeed.”

“True, perfectly and undeniably true,” re-

turned Miss Thorwold; and therefore, without further preface, let me ask if you have written the promised note to Lord William?"

"Had I not so recently deprecated all quarrelling between us, my dear, I should be tempted to scold you for doubting it;" and Mrs. Knight put a note into Amelia's hand as she spoke.

"Yes, my dear friend, you have not only kept your promise, but have kept it well," said she, as she ran her eye over it; "and I am much obliged to you. If this does not bring him to Crosby, I am ready to pledge you my promise that I will hold myself in readiness to marry Alfred Dermont as soon as the settlements can be got ready."

"He has proposed, then?" said Mrs. Knight, eagerly.

"It is my fault and not his, my dear, if the words have not yet been spoken," replied Miss Thorwold, "or rather it was the fault of that little idiot, Miss Drummond, who, by the way, is as violently in love with him as he is with me. But you need not look terrified at that, Mrs. Knight."

"Terrified? No, indeed, I am not terrified. That is using a very strong word, Amelia. But, do you know, I think her excessively pretty. There is something so delicate, so young, so beautifully innocent about her," said Mrs. Knight.

There was some bitterness in the sneer with which the beautiful Amelia listened to this, but she replied gaily, "Well, my dear, with all her 'young charms,' I did not feel afraid of employing her to enact the part of Duenna to me in the billiard-room this morning. Much as Mrs. Dermont appears to approve her son's love-making, and perfectly clear as it is that she has invited me on purpose that I might listen to him, I doubt if she would have thought it quite correct for us to walk off tête-à-tête to the billiard-room. And he thought so too, I presume, for it was he who invited this pale-faced little miss to accompany us. Neither is there any occasion for you to alarm yourself on account of your black-eyed beauty's being in love with the youth herself. The only effect this can possibly have, will be the giving a little piquancy

to my own affair with him, which I suspect it never would have attained without it. I do not mean that it was any manœuvring of hers which prevented his uttering what it is so evident he is dying to say. It was only her presence."

"Then you must take care, Amelia, to give him a speedy opportunity when this little girl is *not* present. I really cannot endure Mrs. Dermont and Co. many days longer, and whatever may happen between Lord William and you to break it off afterwards, I must tell you fairly that, for your uncle's sake, as well as your own, I do insist upon your not leaving the house till you are engaged to him."

"Very well, ma'am," replied the young lady, carelessly, "I have not the least objection, for I am quite as much determined for myself as you can be for me, that I will not only accept, but actually marry this pretty boy, if I can do no better. But just permit me, will you, to add one single line to your note?" And so saying, Miss Thorwold, who still held the epistle addressed to Lord Wil-

liam Hammond in her hand, approached the table and took possession of a pen.

“Upon my word, Amelia, I think you are exceedingly foolish,” said Mrs. Knight. “Depend upon it your volunteering a correspondence with his lordship will not answer. I should think you knew him better than that.”

“I know him perfectly well,” replied the enamoured fair one, persevering in her determination, “and will take especial care not to wound his sensitive delicacy. You know the proverb. One man may steal a horse, &c. And be quite sure, my dear lady, that one woman may do what she likes, and another may not.”

“A very dangerous notion, Miss Thorwold, depend upon it,” replied Mrs. Knight, very gravely. “However,” she added, “it matters very little. I cannot suppose you mad enough to hesitate about accepting this young man when you have once convinced yourself that you can never be Lady William Hammond. So write what you like, my dear; you have my free permission.”

It was with rather a saucy curl of the lip

that the beauty bowed her acceptance of this gracious licence to do, what she would doubtless have done without it; and then, seating herself at the desk, she wrote, in the most delicate characters imaginable, the following pithy postscript:

“P.S. Do come! It will be so pleasant!

“ A. T.”

“ There, Mrs. Knight! You perceive I have not been very verbose,” said Amelia, rising, and leaving the letter open on the desk. “I give you leave to read my sentimental effusion, if you like it. And now I must repair my toilet for the luncheon-table. No carelessness of mine shall injure the effect of my charms, or endanger, in any way, the security of my brilliant *pis aller*.”

CHAPTER IV.

THERE were several other letters written at the Mount that morning besides this joint epistle from Mrs. Knight and her beautiful friend to Lord William Hammond ; and for the especial gratification of my readers, I will take the liberty of peeping into the letter-bag before it is sent off to the post,—for nothing can assist the development of character so effectually as the perusal of confidential epistles.

“ From Mrs. Knight to the Lord Viscount Ripley.

“ My Dear Friend,

“ It is not often, you know, that I make any attempt to interfere with your per-

tinacious love of London, in season or out of season,—nor with any other predilection which appears to contribute to your happiness. Satisfied that your friendship for me stands firm, whether we are together or asunder, I have schooled myself to the endurance of much longer separations than are agreeable, without ever risking a remonstrance that might annoy you. I think you must be aware that this is my system, and that I have adhered to it steadily ; but I must break through it now, and that for very important reasons. On the tenth of next month I mean to rouse my dormant energies for the purpose of giving an entertainment to the whole county at once, which I always find to be a great economy both of money and trouble. The ostensible object of the meeting will be the old fashioned plan of shooting for a silver arrow. One must give some reason or other for bringing people together at two o'clock, and making them sit down to dinner at four, by means of calling it breakfast. I dare say that most of the people will consider it a

great bore, but some will like it ; and what is more to the purpose, it serves the purpose of a ball, and a dozen dinners, all in one. The time has been, my dear lord, when you have yourself declared that you liked to see me in green and silver, with sandals *à la Diane* and so forth ; but I will not be so childish as to fancy any such feelings can exist now. Nevertheless, I do very earnestly beg you to come to Crosby for this fête. Amelia, of course, is here, and I have, *at last*, great hopes that I have been able to secure an excellent marriage for her. The young man is several years (nearly ten, I am afraid) her junior, which I certainly feel to be a very great objection, for twenty years on the other side is, in my opinion, infinitely more suitable in an alliance of this nature. But, under the circumstances, my dear lord, I need hardly point out the propriety of not making any objections on this score—and most happy am I to say that I know of none on any other. Colonel Dermont, of the Mount (one of the handsomest places in this county), is a very

estimable and respectable person in every way and the young man in question is his only child. The property he will inherit is said to be above five thousand a year; and his devotion to Amelia, who certainly looks handsomer than ever, gives every reason to hope that the settlements will be more in proportion to his fortune than hers. But his father, of course, will have a voice on this point, which brings me to the strongest reason I have to offer for your coming down here. I know, as well as you do, my dear friend, that your doing any thing for her in the way of giving money (excepting just for a few smart dresses) is perfectly out of the question,—nor do I believe that she expects it. But this may not be equally clear to Colonel Dermont, and when the offer has been made in form, which we are hourly expecting, he will doubtless think it proper to communicate with you. Now it strikes me, that the only means of avoiding such a direct application as must be replied to by a direct answer, will be your coming amongst us in person.

And then, you know, nothing can be easier than for you to say, not as a matter of business, but as mere affectionate chit-chat, that if Amelia marries well, and to your satisfaction, you shall ever treat her as your own child ; and so I dare say you will—for were she ten times your child, you could not give her what you have not got. Should the colonel desire you to specify *what* you will do for her, I shall recommend you to reply that it is not your intention to do any thing during your life, but that you shall take care to do your duty by her in your will. What renders your making this effort exceedingly desirable, is the disagreeable fact, that Amelia is so deeply in debt as to render it probable she will be arrested, unless the speedy prospect of a good marriage shall set her various creditors at rest, as to their doubts of obtaining payment. The office you have assigned to me, my dearest lord, is no sinecure. As the only child of your only brother, an orphan as lovely in person as she is near to you in blood, could not, as we both well know, be permitted to

fall into such difficulties as must end by her becoming the inmate of a prison, without drawing upon you such a degree of censure as I could not endure to listen to. This, and this only, could induce me to disturb the tranquillity of my existence, by keeping with me one of the most headstrong and violent-tempered young women that ever lived. She torments me even now,—pressed as she is by the constant horror of this threatened arrest,—she torments me even now, with capricious vagaries about the young man, who, by the way, is a perfect Apollo in beauty; but he is too youthful, it seems, for her taste. That, as a matter of taste, she is right, I do not pretend to deny; but I am sorry to say, that Amelia Thorwold is no longer in a position to listen to its suggestions. She has, however, at length, promised to be reasonable, and if you will come among us, my dear friend, at this critical moment, I have no doubt that all will end well. The young lady, I lament to say, does not stand in any great awe of me, and not unfrequently gives me to understand

that she suspects I may have been conscious of some of the weaknesses of humanity as well as herself ; but surely, my friend, the cases are rather different. An attachment, of which none can know the devotion except she who has felt it, *may* have led to the demonstration of some weakness of character under circumstances by which a cruel fate had rendered life too bitter to endure without it. But no one can say that I ever ran in debt. All this, however, is useless. It would certainly be a great consolation and relief to have an hour or two of unreserved conversation with the dearest friend I have ; and, for the present, I keep up my spirits by the hope of obtaining it. Farewell !

“Yours, more than her own,

“CLARA KNIGHT.”

Nor was Miss Thorwold herself without a confidential friend to whom she was in the habit of opening her heart by the most unreserved conversations, when in London, and by equally unreserved letters, when in the country.

This singularly chosen, confidential friend, was a woman who had been originally educated for the place of teacher at a fashionable boarding-school, a situation which she continued to hold for a year or two, but left it to make (as she assured all her favourite pupils) a very advantageous marriage. Perhaps she thought so herself; but, however this may be, it is certain that the exchange she had made did not permanently prove a good one, for a few years later found her in a situation of great destitution and misery.

She had then a child, who, with herself, seemed in considerable danger of starving; but, happily, the child died, and the woman, freed from the incumbrance, continued to struggle with difficulties so successfully, as to obtain the situation of lady's maid in a noble family; there, by some means or other, she contrived to make money; and not liking the restraint which domestic service imposed, she left it, and set up as a buyer and seller of the very highest order of fine clothes.

More business is done in this way among

ladies of fashion, throughout all the capitals of Europe, than ladies of no fashion are generally aware. In the course of this traffic she became known to Miss Thorwold, and the only excuse that can be offered for the ill-assorted intimacy which ensued is, that the original education of Mrs. Stedworth had left its traces both in her language and deportment. Moreover, nature had done much for her. She must have been strikingly handsome in her early youth, and even now, at the age of forty, there was much left of that prepossessing charm which beauty gives. Tall and thin, with fine eyes, and large, but perfectly regular features, there was something of almost Siddonian dignity (quite of the tragic kind too) in her aspect, which redeemed those who admitted her to the honour of familiar conversation from the charge of tolerating vulgarity. Mrs. Stedworth, neither in dress, language, nor person, had any thing vulgar about her; and, moreover, she was a woman of very considerable natural capacity. What blunders she might have made in early life, it is

hardly worth while to inquire; but she was now very far from being in needy circumstances; nor was Miss Thorwold the only lady of fashion with whom she was on terms of such familiar intimacy, as to render her infinitely better acquainted with their characters, their pecuniary affairs, and their adventures, than all their nearest and dearest relations put together. This is enough of preface to make the following letter from the beautiful Amelia intelligible.

“Dear Stedworth.—If I did not know how deeply and devotedly you are attached to me, I should not take the trouble of sitting upright, when I happen to be excessively tired, for the purpose of writing to you. But there is that about you, my poor dear Stedworth, which renders any doubt of your sincerity absolutely impossible. I truly believe that you would no more condescend to say you loved me, if you did not, than an empress would. You are a strange, out of the way creature, my poor Stedworth, and that must be my excuse for my admitting you, as I have done, to my confidence. And

truly, my good woman, there is a comfort, that it is well worth paying a little condescension for, in opening an aching and overfull heart, to any one of whose affection one can be as sure as I am of yours. I have a new trouble now, my dear soul, and Heaven only knows how it will end. Yet it has come in the (generally) agreeable shape of an extremely handsome young lover, with a very handsome estate, and the strongest possible inclination to settle it all upon me, if I will only accept him along with it. But, very unluckily, though he is beyond all comparison the handsomest creature I ever saw, he is, in my estimation, as totally devoid of all attraction as if he were made of wood. And then, as you will know, unless you are goose enough to think I can be cured by nightingales and green fields, my whole heart and soul are devoted to another. Ah ! Stedworth ! you cannot have forgotten yet what excellent bargains you got of every thing belonging to me that had a shade of blue in it, because it was a colour Lord W. H. detested ! And when I tell you that

I seem, in this case, to be doomed to constancy, and to love on, despite time and absence, with all the fidelity of a perfect pigeon, you will readily imagine that the addresses of a blooming youth, rising twenty-one, can have no great charm for me. And now, Stedworth, I have no doubt in the world that, if you were with me, you would lift your great large eyes to Heaven, and exclaim: 'Oh, my dear! remember the debts!' Remember them? Gracious Heaven! as if I were ever able to forget them for a single moment! So far am I from forgetting them on this particular occasion, Stedworth, that I sometimes think I would instantly submit to marry this insipid boy, without giving one sinking struggle more to save myself, were he at this moment in actual possession of his estate. But he is not, and may not be for these twenty years. If I do take him—which I must do, if every other hope fails—it can only be by making him play upon the absurdly exaggerated fondness of his parents, that I shall be able to get these hateful debts paid. True, indeed, I should have the comfort

of seeing him go to prison for them, instead of myself, and there certainly is strong temptation in that—and should this desperate resource prove to be the only one left me, I will endeavour to cheer and strengthen my spirit by remembering it.

“But though my old habit of saying all and every thing to you, my good Stedworth, makes me run on in this way, much as if we had only this little writing-table between us, I have something more business-like to say to you. You will not, I suppose, be greatly surprised to hear that I do not intend to take this young gentleman for better and worse without feeling very perfectly sure that I cannot get out of this hateful scrape in any other way. I need not go over again all the offs and ons of that too enchanting mortal, Lord W. H. You know that I love him passionately, devotedly, desperately, if you will, and that nothing but dire necessity will ever make me abandon the dear lingering hope of being his wife. That he loves me passionately too, you may venture to believe on my assertion, and, moreover, that notwithstand-

ing the *fast living* of which he stands accused, I have no sort of doubt of his being able, when he really wishes it, of obtaining from the enormously rich duke, his brother, sufficient assistance to clear his own debts and mine into the bargain. This done, he must take some diplomatic appointment. I trust it will be at Paris. Where we may live, every body says, in the most perfectly good style upon something incredibly small. And don't you think I shall like this better, goody Stedworth, than becoming Mistress Alfred Dermont, residing at the beautiful retirement of the Mount, with my respected parents-in-law, driving out once a week with four heavy horses, and paying all my nice little bills once a month?

“At any rate I know what *I* think about it, and I will not marry this wearisome boy till I feel perfectly certain that I can hope for nothing better. What I wish you to do for me is this. Go to the divine creature's lodgings in Park-street; you know the number well enough, old friend. Go disguised in any shape or way that you like, but find out be-

fore you answer me whether that Mrs. More is living with him still. Don't suppose, however, that I am such an idiot as to be jealous; I merely want the information as a matter of fact concerning him which will assist to put me *au fait* of his situation. He will be here, Stedworth, within a fortnight. You stare, good woman! But it is quite true I assure you. And then my destiny will be decided. And yet—who knows? The invitation to him only goes by this post. Then how dare I feel thus certain that it will be accepted? If it is *not*, if an opportunity of passing a day or two with me in the country is offered to him, and he refuses it, I hereby solemnly promise to marry Alfred Dermont with as little loss of time as possible.

“And now you know all about me, and my plans, my hopes, and my fears, my doubts, and my dreads. Write to me as soon as you can possibly obtain the information I require, and believe me to be your truly attached friend.

“AMELIA THORWOLD.”

“P.S. Of course you will take care to let my detestable dressmaker hear speedily of this projected marriage with young Dermont. Remember that he is the only son of Colonel Dermont of the Mount; one of the handsomest places in this county. And not only the dressmaker, you know, but everybody else who may take *an interest* in such news.”

Miss Celestina, too, wrote a long letter to some “dear Miss Willis,” but though exceedingly interesting, and full of a very great variety of tender feelings respecting Mrs. Stephens, Ensign Wheeler, and Captain Waters, I cannot, just at present find a place for it. Neither Mr. Marsh nor Miss Verepoint wrote any letters at all, nor did Mrs. Stephens interrupt her interesting little work for the benefit of her distant friends. But Mr. Stephens not being capable of assisting her in this mutually interesting occupation did wile away a portion of the time between breakfast and luncheon by writing to an intimate friend and near relation, who was a general practitioner in medicine, enjoying considerable

practice in a distant county. Such a correspondent, though he was a man of great philosophical research, may not be considered as likely to receive any information, from his classical cousin, of a nature likely to interest the general reader. But there was one sentence so strongly indicative of the meditations which were going on in his finely organised mind, that it shall be extracted. Speaking of his wife, he says, "I need not reiterate to you, my dear Thomas, the praises of this admirable creature, in which I have already so often indulged when addressing you. But my anxious heart prompts me to ask one question, which I wish, without any effort whatever to spare my feelings, you would answer with professional distinctness. My beloved Arabella, whose immense intellectual superiority has made me, from the very first of our acquaintance, totally indifferent about her age, has never very distinctly told me how old she is. And conscious that, from one so greatly her junior as I unfortunately am, any direct inquiry upon this point might be unpleasant, I have never ad-

dressed any such to her. But I have lately chanced to fall into company with an old gentleman who knew her well in her early youth, and from him I learnt, before he was aware of my being her husband, that she was born in the last year of the last century. Now I wish you to tell me, my dear Thomas, with the most perfect sincerity, whether there is not some danger of life incurred, when a lady, so considerably past forty, increases her family for the first time?"

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CHAPTER V.

THERE had been, at the first commencement of Miss Thorwold's visit, a coldness and reserve in her manner towards Julia, which led that anxious little personage to fear that she must abandon the hope of becoming intimate with her, and heavy was the sorrow which pressed upon her heart as she thought that as soon as the intended marriage had taken place, she should probably be separated from the friend of her childhood for ever. But when the two young ladies met again, which was at the luncheon-table, the demeanour of Miss Thorwold was so greatly changed towards her, that Julia's hopes revived, and again her innocent spirit was

cheered by the thought that she might live to be a faithful, constant, useful friend both to Alfred and to her. Joyfully, therefore, did she receive Amelia's advances, and Alfred had the great satisfaction of seeing them walk out of the room together, arm in arm. In case this new whim, on the part of the beauty, may seem to require explanation, it may be as well to state that it arose from no deeper feeling than a wish to find something of amusement and excitement in probing the little girl's heart, which might assist to keep herself sufficiently awake and on the alert, during the tedious days which must pass before this important, but particularly wearisome, visit was brought to a conclusion.

"You must positively let me make you my friend and companion, Miss Drummond," said she, "while Mrs. Knight and I continue our delightful visit here. The only thing that is wanted to make the Mount the most fascinating place in the world, is the presence of a young friend to enjoy it with me."

Julia's answer was given by her speaking eyes before her lips could utter it, and con-

veyed an eager assurance of most grateful pleasure from the proposal. Amelia looked at her much in the manner of a naturalist who has got a scarce sort of insect for the first time placed in his hands for examination. "What you think that if I let you hang about me, my precocious little lady, it may lead to a comparison of our complexions, or our ages perhaps?" thought she, while a smile played about her handsome mouth. "But I must have strangely forgotten my craft and my calling if that plan succeed."

* * * * *

The billiards went on in the morning, the rides, drives, and walks after mid-day, and the waltzing every evening, to the full and entire satisfaction of Alfred, although no perfectly favourable opportunity occurred for his proposing the all-important question to the lady of his choice; and this Amelia was determined that he should not do till her final experiment upon the heart of Lord William Hammond had been made.

"I knew what it would come to," said she to Mrs. Knight, who, during one of their

private conferences, was urging her rather to bring the declaration on than to put it off. "I knew his youthful ardour a great deal too well, my dear, to trust to his modesty or discretion after the question has been asked and answered in any way that was not a peremptory and positive dismissal. I will not trust him, I promise you. You will be pleased to remember the terms of our agreement; I am to have one trial more with Lord William, and how is that to be managed if Master Dermont is to come to your fête, considering himself as my affianced husband?"

"Heaven grant, Amelia, that you may not play your game too cunningly, as many and many such a game has been played before," said Mrs. Knight; "and though the hint is not a pleasant one, I think it my duty to remind you that it is rather too late in the day for you to run any risk. I confess I have very little hope that you will ever encounter such another opportunity again."

"You are excessively obliging, my dear madam," returned Miss Thorwold, affectionately, "but it is surprising to me, consider-

ing your own experience of the long-protracted power of beauty, that you should already feel so much anxiety on my account. Do endeavour to tranquillise your spirits, Mrs. Knight ; I will take very good care not to lose my conquest, I promise you."

And assuredly Mrs. Knight was wrong if she fancied that Alfred had any chance of breaking his chain. Miss Thorwold, notwithstanding her repeated failures among the more experienced and thoroughly enlightened portion of mankind ran very little risk of wearing out the first love of so vehement an adorer as Alfred, as long as no other men were present who might tempt her looks and smiles to wander away from him. In truth she managed the matter admirably ; for although Alfred had never yet proposed to her, and that for no other reason than because she had never afforded him an opportunity of doing so, it had never once occurred to him that there was any premeditation in this. Moreover, he was so perfectly happy in the enjoyment of her radiant presence, and so enraptured by the multitude of little co-

quettish *agaceries* with which she permitted herself to indulge him, that he really was never sufficiently cool-headed to reflect how often he had approached her with the full determination of laying his heart at her feet, and how constantly he had been prevented from doing so by some little manœuvre of hers.

In short, he loved on in a state of unspeakable enjoyment of the present, without feeling any anxiety whatever for the future.

All beautiful young ladies of Miss Thorwold's age, feeling as strongly as she did the necessity of marrying somebody or other, would do well to throw out all their fascinations for the junior class of marriageable young men ; for it requires as limited a knowledge of ladies' hearts as that of poor Alfred, to see and understand the difference between those which receive a love as freely displayed as his, with the intention of accepting and returning it, and those who permit it to flutter round them either for the mere pleasure of watching it, or the more dangerous purpose of turning it to account if necessary.

An older man than Alfred would have known perfectly well, that, when upon the nearest possible approach to a declaration, Amelia invariably performed some lively piece of playfulness, or suddenly recollected that Mrs. Knight was waiting for her, it was because she neither chose to give him up nor to accept him.

But no such thought ever occurred to him. The *angel*, as he called her fifty times a day, sometimes within reach of her own ear, oftener within reach of Julia's, and oftener still to his own heart, the *angel*, if his attentions were irksome to her, might have dismissed him by a single frown. But the frown came not, and Alfred continued, without a shadow of misgiving, to luxuriate in the paradise which his fancy had created.

But Julia was not quite so well satisfied. She had persuaded herself into the firm conviction that the only happiness which was now left within her reach in this life was the witnessing Alfred's happiness in a union with Miss Thorwold, and she felt a feverish longing for the information that their marriage

was finally settled and arranged. Alfred, who, when the beauty escaped to the solitude of her own room, or the tête-à-tête companionship of Mrs. Knight, used invariably to seek Julia that he might talk to her about the divinity of his beloved, constantly replied to her anxious inquiries on the subject, that he had the supreme happiness of knowing perfectly well that he was beloved, but that as yet his sweet Amelia had shrunk from any positive avowal of his passion.

Not for the universe would Julia have hinted to him her thoughts on the subject; but, notwithstanding the condescending attention with which Miss Thorwold continued from time to time to honour her, often endeavouring to make her talk of herself and her notions of love, notwithstanding her endeavouring to persuade herself that this was very amiable, and showed a most flattering wish to be intimate with her, she could not like or approve Miss Thorwold's manner to Alfred.

With a species of tact which, in a woman, requires no experience to help it, she per-

ceived that every look she looked, every smile she smiled, every word she spoke, and every little sigh she breathed, was *done on purpose*. She saw, too, not only that the purpose was successful, but that Alfred was for ever lost in fond admiration of Amelia's beautiful *naiveté* precisely when her own heart sunk within from discovering her systematic affectation.

Upon one occasion when something of this kind had occurred, as they were all three sitting at a little table, pretending to be intent upon finding out words from letters selected for each other, from a box of alphabets, the eyes of Julia fixed themselves involuntarily on Miss Thorwold, who was going through a regular manual of coquettish tricks, for the (to her) evident purpose of persuading him that she was fluttered and agitated by his earnest manner of looking at her, whereas Julia was perfectly persuaded, from various little observations almost too minute to record, that the whole scene was on the lady's part neither more nor less than a piece of accomplished acting. Amelia caught her eye

before it was withdrawn, and felt the grave rebuke of its fixed glance. She coloured violently, and instantly rising, said: "I fear, Mr. Dermont, that Miss Drummond thinks we are amusing ourselves in a very childish manner. No doubt she is right. But it is very difficult to be always wise, is it not?"

What Julia had done to produce this evidently painful impression on his divine Amelia, he knew not, but most vehemently angry did he feel with her; and, without thinking it necessary to inquire into particulars, he determined that, for the future, he would endeavour to prevent her remaining near them as much as she had hitherto done.

To say the truth, he was conscious that Amelia *had* betrayed a good deal of emotion, and the idea that any feeling of prudery on the part of Julia should check what was so very delightful to him, was considerably more than his habits of never being contradicted in any thing, could enable him to bear patiently.

He also rose, and darting a fierce look of

displeasure at the conscious girl, who was well aware that Miss Thorwold had read a part, at least, of what was passing in her mind, said, in a tone which did very tolerable justice to his feelings:

“If our amusements are not sufficiently sublime to suit the taste of Miss Drummond, I really should recommend her leaving us to ourselves, and seeking what may be more congenial to her taste elsewhere.”

In order to understand the sharpness of the pang which this speech inflicted on Julia, it will be necessary to remember all she *must* have suffered before she brought herself to undergo the penance which had, by degrees, been thrown upon her by the evident wish of the lovers, of remaining with them, that she might shield them by her presence, from the disagreeable observations which were likely to have followed the too frequent recurrence of positive tête-à-têtes!

“Pray do not go, Miss Thorwold,” added Alfred, eagerly reseating himself at the table, from which she seemed about to rise. “Surely Miss Drummond’s taste need not be impera-

tive upon us. I have got a word here that I so very much wish to give you !”

Miss Thorwold looked at the varying colour of poor Julia, and, confirmed in her conviction that she loved Alfred, enjoyed with no trifling pleasure, the painful expression of her features. She was herself most heartily tired of having every imaginable word expressive of love or beauty, or having any connexion with matrimony, set before her, in order that she might “*find it out*,” but she could by no means give Julia the triumph of believing that her impertinent looks had broken up the party.

She had before hated her with a strange bitterness, considering the total absence of every thing like offence on the part of the innocent girl, but now the feeling against her was no longer mere dislike—it was resentment, and she only waited for her leaving the room, before, pushing the toys which had occupied them gravely aside, she said:

“It is very painful to me, Mr. Dermont, to perceive the very strong and, I must say, unmerited dislike, which your father’s ward

has evidently conceived against me. I am greatly afraid that the only right thing for me to do is, to leave the Mount and return to Crosby, whether Mrs. Knight should think fit to shorten her visit or not. You must surely be aware, Alfred, though you cannot possibly understand all I feel, that it must be terribly painful to me to see myself the object of dislike and reprehension."

"Dislike and reprehension!" exclaimed Alfred, trembling both with rage and love. "Miss Thorwold!—Amelia!—admirable, lovely, adored Amelia!—let me, oh! let me!"

"Ah, Alfred! you are thoughtless in wishing to detain me thus!" replied Amelia, startled by the evidently near danger of hearing the decisive question which she was so determined not to hear just at present, and snatching her hand with an appearance of nervous terror from the passionate grasp of her young lover, she added, "you are thoughtless, Mr. Dermont, I will not say you are unkind, for, trust me, my heart acquits you of every feeling that is not good,

noble, and generous towards me." And here, having reached the door, the graceful creature drew forth her embroidered handkerchief, and applied it for an instant to her eyes. "Farewell, Alfred! Farewell, my dear friend," she added, with a little sob. "Fear not but we shall meet again. But if you—if you really have a regard for me, you will prefer seeing me where there shall be no danger of my receiving such looks as have been directed to me to-day."

"I will not detain you, Miss Thorwold!" cried Alfred, in a perfect agony of emotion. "On my life, on my honour, I will not ask you to listen to a single word, a single thought of all that my heart swells to say to you. It shall not be here, Amelia; it shall not be in my father's house that I will venture to tell you." Miss Thorwold extended her hand towards the lock of the door. "Nay, Amelia! Trust me! Let me conjure you to trust me one moment longer. What I feel at the conduct of the treacherous young creature whom I so truly believed to be my devoted friend, and as

much my sister in affection, as if the parents of one of us had been the parents of the other also, I will not attempt to tell you," said Alfred, his lips trembling with emotion, "I cannot express it to you—I have no power, no words!" Large tears were in his eyes, and he turned abruptly from her to conceal feelings of which he fancied himself ashamed.

But Miss Thorwold saw it all, and her firm set teeth were rather strongly ground together within her ruby lips. "And the silly boy fancies that he hates her, I dare say," was the thought that made her turn her beautiful eyes upon him with a more unequivocal expression of tenderness than she had ever ventured upon before.

"Oh!—I can guess it all," she said, in a most pathetic tone. "But, indeed, indeed, you must not dwell upon it. Yet I feel some consolation, as I witness these painful feelings, in thinking that your eyes must be opened now to the character of this dangerous young person. Let not your generous unsuspecting heart ever be deceived by her again! Oh! I *could* tell you such

traits of her unmerited hatred towards me! Yet I think you have seen enough to form a tolerably correct judgment for yourself. But I must leave you, Mr. Dermont. Indeed I must! Be very sure that Miss Drummond is watching the door of this room with the eyes of an Argus, and counting every moment that I am so imprudent as to remain alone with you."

"You shall go, Miss Thorwold, you shall go instantly," replied Alfred, making a vehement effort not to fall at her feet, and proclaim his passionate love; "only promise that you will not execute your barbarous threat of going away, and I will wait your own time, lovely tyrant as you are, for telling you." The danger now seemed too pressing to be braved any longer, and Miss Thorwold very prudently seized the handle of the door, turned it, and made her escape; not, however, without casting such a look behind her, as she knew he would remember, to the safe exclusion of every other thought, till they met again.

"There! I have managed our release,

Mrs. Knight, from this wearisome bondage!" exclaimed the yawning beauty, suddenly entering the apartment of her friend.

"Our release!" returned Mrs. Knight, looking both angry and terrified. "You have not surely, Amelia, you have not been mad enough to quarrel with the boy? If you have, I give you my honour, that when we leave the house, you shall go one way, and I another. I positively declare, that I will trouble myself with you and your folly no longer."

Miss Thorwold threw herself into a chair, laughed, and yawned, and laughed again. "How little, how very little, do you know of me and my character, my dear friend," said the young lady, rather scornfully. "Do you know, that, clever as you are, I think I understand you a great deal better than you do me? I should never, for an instant, suspect *you* of sacrificing a great pecuniary advantage, for instance, the chance of catching a tolerably rich viscount, or any thing of that substantially advantageous kind, for the pleasure of indulging either a fit of spleen, or

a fit of dullness. But oh! it is dull, dear friend! And very lengthy, is it not?"

"Then I am to presume that you have not quarrelled with him, I suppose?"

"Yes, my dear lady, you may suppose it, and without any presumption at all. Mr. Alfred Dermont has just been favouring me with such violent demonstrations of love, that, upon my word, instead of scolding, you ought to pet me a little."

"And I will pet you, Amelia, if he has proposed and you have accepted him. Is that what you mean, dearest, by saying you have managed our release?"

"No, dearest, not quite," replied the beauty, with another laugh. "I am by no means the capricious unmeaning person you seem to take me for, my much-esteemed friend. I told you not very long ago, that I did not intend to let this sweet youth come to a formal proposal of marriage till I had given myself one more opportunity of ascertaining whether the love of a man I like better will, or will not, bring him to the same extremity. And now, my dear Mrs. Knight, I tell you

so again. Be so good as to believe me this time, will you? And we shall both be spared any further trouble on that point."

"If you would be so obliging as not to talk to me in riddles, Miss Thorwold, I should have a better chance of fully appreciating the sublimity of your character, and the pertinacity of your will. What did you mean me to understand, when you said that you had managed our release?"

"I meant you to understand that I had devised and executed a project which would enable us to exchange the preternatural dullness of the Mount, for the elegant repose of Crosby; and, although I expected that, with grateful admiration, you would ask me *how*, I did not anticipate that I should get as my reward, such an amount of scolding and threats, as might make me doubt whether I should, indeed, so very greatly improve my condition by giving up the Mount for Crosby."

"You are very ungrateful, Amelia, to resent a warmth of feeling on my part which so strongly proves my affection for you. I would to

Heaven, my dear, that you could teach yourself to appreciate only with common sense and fairness, the innumerable advantages of the Mount, and then you would soon cease to have any idle longings to be elsewhere."

"Example, my dear Mrs. Knight, is worth all the precepts in the world. Let me see you submit gaily, quite gaily it must be, remember, only for ten more days, to the inspiring convivialities of this delicious mansion, and I pledge you my word, that you shall never hear me call it dull again."

"Nonsense, Amelia!" returned her friend, yawning in her turn. "Nothing can be so perfectly unfair as to make my feelings here, a measure for what yours ought to be. You have got to animate and amuse you, one of the handsomest young men that nature ever formed, distractedly in love with you—and I have got—his mamma—for shame, Amelia!"

"Upon my honour, Mrs. Knight, I would very nearly as soon have the mother as the son. If you happened to think my respectable uncle, or any other man of the world,—I don't wish to be personal,—if you happened,

I say, to think any body as fascinating and altogether irresistible as I think Lord William Hammond, you would not perceive more beauty in Master Alfred than I do. But to return to the theme which your suspicions so cruelly interrupted. I tell you that I have hit upon a most excellent expedient for withdrawing ourselves from the overpowering delights of this Elysium. I have fastened a quarrel upon that queer little animal, Miss Julia Drummond, and have told Alfred, in a very sentimental style too, that we must meet elsewhere ! And have left him in a paroxysm of mingled emotions, compounded of adoration for me, and indignation against her."

"How can you be so needlessly spiteful, Miss Thorwold?" said Mrs. Knight, angrily. "If your marriage with the young man depended upon your setting them together by the ears, I could excuse it ; but as this is not the case, I really think your invention is a most detestable one. Pretty, gentle little creature ! I really cannot conceive how you

could find it in your heart to injure such a sweet-looking young thing as that."

"How do you know, Mrs. Knight, but it may be the sweet looks of the young thing which set me upon it? How do you know but that I may be jealous of her?"

"I wish you were, my dear, with all my heart and soul, and then, perhaps, I might forgive you, even if you laid a plot to poison her. But I know you better, Miss Thorwold. You are not at all likely to espy in such a simple, unpretending little creature as Julia Drummond, any thing, either in body or mind, that could suggest the idea of jealousy to you."

"I am not quite so sure of that. Do you know that I could count up a score of the handsomest women in London that I would rather trust Lord William with, than this one little trumpery girl?"

"Indeed?" replied Mrs. Knight, raising her eye-brows. "Then you are less dazzled by the splendour of your own charms than I imagined, my dear. But all jesting apart,

I really cannot see why you should find it necessary to quarrel with any body in order to enable us to get away. If you really are resolute in your determination of keeping the proposal at arm's length till you have again seen Lord William, or till he has refused our invitation, which, I presume, you would consider as an answer in full,—if you are quite resolute on this point, I see no reason why we may not—why *I* may not inform my amusing friend, Mrs. Dermont, this very evening, while you are enjoying the intoxicating exhilaration of your nightly waltz, that I have friends coming to me from town, and must be at home to receive them.”

“And what will you do in case Mrs. Dermont, in one of her paroxysms of fond indulgence to her son, should beg you to leave me behind?” said Amelia.

“I would be very generous, Miss Thorwold,” replied her friend. “I would tell her that I cannot, as yet, make up my mind to live without you. And then, by way of preparing a little balm for her to pour upon

the bleeding heart of her son, when this dreadful news shall be made known to him, I will tell her of my projected fête, and pretend to consult her as to what day will suit her and her family best."

"And you have told Lord William that it is to be on Thursday week!" exclaimed Miss Thorwold, with a look of dismay.

"How can you be so childish, Amelia?" returned Mrs. Knight, laughing. "Do you really think that there is any danger lest I should change my day at the suggestion of Mrs. Dermont?"

* * * *

The measure thus determined upon between the two ladies, was brought forward with great ability at the time proposed, and received by Mrs. Dermont with the anticipated degree of surprise and regret. But Mrs. Knight did the business so skilfully, that she perfectly succeeded in setting the fond mother's mind at rest respecting the ultimate success of her son with the fair lady of his love; for, having made up her mind completely on the subject of Lord

William Hammond, and not believing that the beautiful Amelia had the slightest chance of so increasing the impression she had appeared to make on the heart of his inconstant lordship as to obtain from him any thing approaching an offer of marriage, Mrs. Knight scrupled not to hint, very intelligibly, that she could not avoid seeing the mutual attachment of her admirable young friend and Mr. Alfred; adding, with every appearance of deep feeling, "I cannot, my dear Mrs. Dermont, give a higher proof of the admiration I feel for your son, than by saying that, notwithstanding all the immense offers which my lovely Amelia has refused, I should see her give her hand and heart to him, with the most entire satisfaction."

This, together with such a mention of the intended fête at Crosby, as she had promised Miss Thorwold to make, perfectly answered the double purpose intended,—that is to say, their departure was announced and decided upon, yet the tender hopes of the enamoured Alfred were in no degree shaken thereby.

CHAPTER VI.

CONSIDERING the great satisfaction felt by the party assembled at the Mount, at the flattering invitation which brought them there, they bore the breaking-up of the party, which seemed to be proclaimed the next morning at breakfast, by the announcement of Mrs. Knight's departure, and that of her young friend, better than might have been expected. Two only out of the set being altogether free from a sort of secret movement of satisfaction upon learning that they were not expected to eat any more solemn breakfasts, dinners, and suppers there at present. Miss Verepoint and George Marsh were the only individuals who felt

the discovery to be disagreeable, for they only had that within them which could render all external circumstances pretty nearly indifferent. As well may a stone, dropped from the summit of a projecting rock be arrested by a wish from falling into the sea at its foot, as such an attachment as theirs be stifled, and put an end to, by the wishes or the efforts of those who feel it.

Both these young people felt, and felt strongly, that there were various objections to their union, much too serious to be got over pleasantly. To George, the idea of a man out of suits with fortune, endeavouring to win the affections of a wealthy heiress, had something so revolting and detestable in it, that, although he went on from day to day engaged in doing this and nothing else, he had never yet found courage to call this occupation by its proper name, and would have been quite as much shocked had some cruel looker-on told him he had been making love, as if they had informed him that he had inadvertently set fire to his neighbour's house.

And as for Charlotte, although she would by no means have judged such an attack upon her affections with equal severity, she was quite as far as he was from deeming their union a happiness within the reach of hope. Could she propose Miss Celestina Marsh to her beloved, her exemplary, her delicate-minded mother, as a most near connexion, and, unless she withdrew herself from that dear, precious mother, as an inmate and every-day companion? Could she do this? No! Not even to become the wife of George Marsh.

But, notwithstanding these most genuine feelings on both sides, they had been happy, oh! very happy, during the ten days they had now passed together, and the pang which accompanied the information that this happiness was about to end, shot through both hearts at once, producing very perfect sympathy.

But as to all the rest of the party, there truly was not one among them who felt any regret. Mr. Stephens, and Mrs. Stephens, and Miss Celestina Marsh, all felt very strongly

the great advantage of having such a long intimate sort of visit at THE MOUNT to talk about. But they all felt also, that it was a dreadfully heavy business to live from morning to night under the influence of Mrs. Dermont's incessant civilities, and never-for-an-instant forgotten duties, as mistress of the house. It was not, certainly, that either of the three were troubled with that delicate sort of sensitiveness which renders every degree of mental annoyance intolerable. But there is something in the species of persecution with which such very dull ladies as Mrs. Dermont beset their guests, that must, sooner or later, wear out the spirits of almost every variety of human beings.

And as if this were not enough, the colonel, though considerably less dull by nature, very effectually filled up the measure of weariness by incessantly pointing out to every guest in succession, and then to them all collectively, and then to all in succession again, that his house and his horses, his grass and his sheep, his dogs and his guns, his gardens and his stables, his wines and his ales, his aspect and

his air, the water that flowed through his ground, and the trees which grew upon it, were all better, very remarkably and particularly better, than those possessed by any other living gentleman whatever.

Such ladies and gentlemen, therefore, as Colonel and Mrs. Dermont do well to adhere to the rest day, dressed day, and pressed day system, for as each brings with it some little variety of its own, the heavy pressure of Dermontian monotony is not so severely felt. But ten days' continuance of the strictly regulated hospitalities of THE MOUNT would tame the spirits of a harlequin.

Neither was this all which had occurred during the visit to make the termination of it welcome. Celestina had very reasonably hoped for officers, but had found none. Mrs. Stephens had laboured to establish a metaphysical friendship with a young gentleman, and had been obliged at last to content herself with a greatly less sublime intimacy with his sister, and Mr. Stephens had made the disagreeable discovery that all ladies of fortune were neither so old, so ugly, nor so pre-

ternaturally cleverer than every body else, as his own "sweet love."

All this tended to facilitate greatly the business of breaking up, the idea of which had hung rather heavily on the mind of Mrs. Dermont during the night which had followed Mrs. Knight's announcement of her intended departure, and the breakfast of the following morning. She had, indeed, been wise enough to avoid repeating within the reach of any mortal ear that awful word "month," which Alfred, in the fervour of his young love, had mentioned as the period to which he flattered himself the visit would extend; yet still she feared that a party established in so very agreeable a mansion, without having heard any time specified for the termination of their stay, might be hard to move, and it was a great relief to her to perceive how very well the majority of the company bore it. For the feelings of Miss Verepoint and poor George were not worn on their sleeves, and though Miss Thorwold knew her duty better than to look otherwise than very sweetly sad, the

obvious reason for this was not of a nature to render it disagreeable.

But even if every thing else had moved on slowly, and with difficulty, the charming spirits of Mrs. Knight would have set it all right again, for the relief which this sudden movement gave her was great indeed. Mrs. Knight was by no means a particularly intellectual person; but, nevertheless, she had a good deal of cleverness about her, and a quick eye for the ridiculous, especially when there was any one near for whose amusement she thought it worth her while to purvey. Moreover she had been much accustomed to that best *vie de château*, in which people being permitted to take their own way in amusing themselves often find it in the occupation of amusing others. But at the Mount, as Mrs. Dermont considered it her duty to amuse every body, nobody was ever amused at all, unless indeed they took the matter so decisively into their own hands as to run away from her.

Alfred bore the departure of his beloved

better than his anxious mother expected; but the idea that Julia, the playmate of his childhood, the friend of his youth, the confident of his first, and as he hoped and believed, of his only passion, that she should prove so corrupted in heart, and so diabolical in temper as to dislike and offend Amelia, had something in it so hostile to every feeling of enjoyment, that he became, as he reflected on it, completely reconciled to the change, and fully convinced that the being permitted to visit her at Crosby would afford him much more unmixed enjoyment than continuing to see her in the presence of Julia at home.

As to poor Julia herself, the only advantage she anticipated from the change was, the being permitted to pass more hours alone. The character and order of intellect of Miss Thorwold had been developed very clearly to her during much less than half the time they had passed under the same roof, as far at least as her conduct and feelings during that interval of time were concerned. And gladly would Julia have given her life could she have changed the false-hearted, artful

coquette into a being worthy of becoming the wife of Alfred Dermont.

“Oh, if she did but love him as I love him !” thought the every way miserable girl, “how much better I could bear the frivolity, the inanity of her mind ! But she loves him not; it is all false, false, false. Poor dear Alfred ! He thinks that I am vexed and angry, because he expressed displeasure at my having *insulted* her, as she called it ! Loyal-hearted and true himself, he dreams not that it is possible she should deceive him. Angry, Alfred, angry with you ? Would to Heaven that I did not love you all the better for it. But how can I watch the pure sincerity of every feeling in him, contrasted with the deep falsehood of every affected feeling in her, and *not* love him the better for it ?”

And then, naturally enough, she failed not to torture herself by reflecting how utterly impossible it was for her to interfere, in order to open his eyes.

Amelia had already given her to understand that she strongly suspected the nature

of the friendship existing between her and Alfred. "On his side, my dear," she had said, "I am quite persuaded that there exists no feeling or fancy of which he has the least reason to be ashamed; but I do not think I could safely venture to say as much for you. Do not think, however, that I mean to be severe. You are still but a child, my little Julia, and I dare say are far from understanding how very disgraceful a volunteer passion on the part of a young lady is considered by well-conducted persons when they are grown up."

Could she interfere after this? Could she doubt for a moment that any thing, and every thing, she might say or do towards lifting the veil that now blinded the judgment of Alfred, would be attributed by Alfred himself (Miss Thorwold's commentary being at hand to help him) to the "disgraceful" passion she had attributed to her! Nay, there was something worse still, the dread of which must for ever keep Julia silent respecting her opinion of Miss Thorwold. How could she trust her own heart?

How could she herself be sure that her judgment was, indeed, as perfectly uninfluenced by her feelings as she believed it to be?

With this fearful doubt at her heart, it was morally impossible for such a creature as Julia to stretch out her hand to save what she loved from destruction, although dreadfully sure that there was no one else in the world who could do it.

One little circumstance there was, which, trifling as it might be, compared with much that she had observed of a worse nature, she certainly did hope he might discover by means of his own eyes. Julia had been only two days in the house with Miss Thorwold, when she found out that the beautiful wild-rose tint on her cheek, was laid there by her own skilful hand. When first the idea arose, she rejected it, and blushed much deeper than the wild rose as she traced the suspicion to her heart, rather than to her eye. "Thy wishes, Ju, were father to that thought," she muttered, with great bitterness of indignation against herself. Nevertheless, the fact became so evident to her senses, certainly a little on the alert, that before many hours

more had increased their acquaintance with each other, there was not a loop-hole left into which her tender conscience would thrust her conviction of it. At sixteen and a half—especially if such an adventure as discovering rouge, where rouge is not intended to be seen, has never befallen the observer—the playing such sly tricks upon nature is considered a matter of very considerable atrocity, and our little novice thought that, if known to Alfred, it might go far towards convincing him that his Amelia was not exactly what he believed her to be—a consummation which, without the very slightest mixture of selfish feeling, she would have given her right hand to produce. But no, it was impossible—perfectly, absolutely impossible, that she should ever take upon her the task of telling Alfred, her too dearly loved Alfred, that if he could but open his eyes, he would be sure to see that the lady he loved was unworthy of him, and, therefore, that he was at liberty to turn round, and see if she herself were not more so.

It may be, after all, that Julia was to

blame in thus shrinking from making manifest, truths which she must have felt to be so important to the happiness of the friend she loved. But if all the casuists in the world had pointed this out to her at that time, she would have been incapable of acting otherwise.

It was, however, a very beautiful natural feeling that was at work within her; and it required more experience than she yet possessed, to show her that there may be occasions when a sterner line of conduct than any arising from personal considerations, let them be as generous as they will, must be followed, or mischief may ensue.

And so Miss Thorwold and her accomplished chaperon departed, leaving Alfred with the delightful hope of soon becoming the happy husband of the best, the sweetest, the most guileless, the most gentle-hearted, and the loveliest woman in the world.

* * * * *

The answer of Lord Ripley was every thing that Mrs. Knight wished it to be—accepting her invitation, expressing very lively

satisfaction at the excellent chance of getting rid of his troublesome niece, and tenderly grateful for the share she had had in it.

That of Lord William Hammond was not so long, but it was equally agreeable. It declared his resolution of being at Crosby at the time appointed, though all the powers of light and darkness combined, set themselves to prevent it, and under the heading of P.S. were the following words: "Do. If I do *not*, may I be doomed eternally to suffer torments worse (if possible!) than that of being chained in the body to one place, while my spirit is panting to be in another."

Mrs. Knight put the precious document into the hands of her fair friend, with something a good deal like a sneer upon her lips; but the younger lady perused it in a far different spirit. Triumph, hope, and joy flashed from her eyes, and it was a great pity that poor Alfred Dermont had not been beside her at that moment, for, if he had, there is every probability that she might, with much more than her usual sincerity, have made him aware of the real value she had for him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE Lords Ripley and William Hammond did not arrive at Crosby on the day of the archery meeting, nor on the day immediately preceding it—but one day earlier still, according to the invitations they had received; for Mrs. Knight was well acquainted with Lord Ripley's admirable taste in all things belonging to a gala, and, therefore, naturally thought that the wisest and most prudent thing she could do would be to give sufficient time for her to take advantage of this peculiar talent on the present occasion.

It may be thought that, considering her views for Miss Thorwold, she did not display an equal degree of discretion in naming the

same early day for the arrival of Lord William. But more than one reason existed which may account for this. In the first place, her conviction that Lord William Hammond had no more intention of marrying Miss Thorwold than of jumping over Westminster-bridge, made her feel that his passing a few hours more or less in her society could not really make any difference.

Secondly, it was quite impossible that she could profit by Lord Ripley's advice, if she did not in some way get rid of the troublesome Amelia; and, thirdly, nothing was more desirable than that the said troublesome Amelia should be kept in good humour during her uncle's visit; for if she were not, she would be likely to make various impertinent observations, either about his being their doll, or else about his staying there so long; all of which she was as likely as not to communicate to her aunt Ripley, if she found herself perfectly at leisure to write to her.

The nervous, anxious, hoping, and fearing Miss Thorwold had made up her mind to

believe that her first look into the eyes of Lord William Hammond would enable her to judge whether she had any hope of eventually winning him or not. And the result of that first look was such as to raise her from a very vacillating and see-saw sort of condition, very nearly balanced between fear and hope, into a state of more triumphant confidence in the gentleman's love and admiration, than she had ever enjoyed before.

Beyond all doubt his eyes were very eloquent eyes, and beyond all doubt they did, at that moment, express a prodigious deal of tender passion for the beautiful person who had set herself so earnestly to read them.

The two gentlemen arrived just in time to dress for dinner, and the *partie carrée* which followed was almost as agreeable as a *partie carrée* could be. Doubtless two *tête-à-têtes* might have been more agreeable still, but this, of course, could not be hoped for till the following day, when the lounging habits of such a pleasant house as that of Mrs. Knight was sure to afford opportunity for it.

Meanwhile, however, the evening which

this friendly party passed together was exceedingly agreeable, for they all appeared in good-humour, and perfectly well disposed to be amiable. It was, indeed, impossible that any gentleman in the world, being an uncle, could be less in the way of a lady, being his niece, than Lord Ripley was in that of Miss Thorwold. That she flirted outrageously with Lord William was as evident to the viscount as it was to Lord William himself, but that judicious nobleman, though standing in *loco parentis* to the beauty, was of too indulgent a temper to feel any sort of displeasure on that account towards her, even though he was really almost as anxious as it was possible an uncle could be, that nothing should interfere to prevent her marriage with the young gentleman whose addresses had been so pleasantly announced to him.

One little hint, however, he thought it might be as well to throw out, as well for Lord William's safe conduct as her own. Lord Ripley, like his acute friend, Mrs. Knight, had long ago given up all hope of Amelia's ever becoming Lady William Ham-

mond; and therefore, he very justly thought, although there could be no reason why they should not amuse themselves by a little innocent flirtation, if they liked it, that it might be desirable to enlighten his fascinating lordship on the young lady's approaching marriage, in order to prevent his putting himself too conspicuously forward as her adorer when her *future* should be present.

With this object in view, he said, with the most easy, good-natured, *nonchalante* manner imaginable. "I say, Hammond, we all know what winning ways you have, and how extremely capable you are of making fair ladies forget that there is any body present but yourself. This is all vastly well, as long as we are *en petite comité* here, but it may be just as well to inform you, *mon cher*, that the day after to-morrow you will have the honour of being introduced to a certain Mr. Alfred Dermont, a well-born youth, with a handsome estate, who aspires to the hand of my fair niece. I am so well pleased by this news, that I fully intend to pinch myself a little, in order to make

Amelia a present of a few thousands on the happy occasion. So I give you warning, noble sir, that I shall take it very particularly ill, if you do ought to fill the young man's head with jealous fears, at the great risk of pushing out all matrimonial projects thereby. Do you understand?"

"Oh! perfectly, my lord," was the reply, and it was spoken in a tone as light and airy as that in which the address that produced it had been uttered.

But Amelia, whose eye was eagerly fixed upon his countenance, saw that he changed colour; and when Lord Ripley, satisfied that he had fully performed his duty, turned away, in order to begin a new game of chess with Mrs. Knight, she had the unspeakable happiness of receiving such a furious glance from his expressive eyes, as failed not to convince her that he was suffering at that moment from a pang of jealousy which could not possibly exist without love.

Nor was she mistaken in this; such love as Lord William Hammond was capable of feeling, she had certainly inspired, and he

had long been convinced that this passion was fully returned.

More than once, in the course of the last year, he had very nearly made up his mind to propose to her ; but at forty years of age, a man thinks more deliberately of this act, before he commits it, than a man of twenty; and such a multitude of important suggestions presented themselves between the impassioned thought and the more deliberate act, that at length he decided that he would not " be such a confounded fool for any woman in Christendom," and thenceforward, he had contented himself by betraying just enough of his passionate admiration to keep her in constant expectation of his betraying more, while he took care to make her preference for him, over every other man that approached her, sufficiently obvious to prevent any other man from seriously thinking of her for a moment.

It is probable that his lordship was not himself fully aware how much he should really dislike her marrying any one else, for he felt perfectly satisfied that his influence

was such, as to render such an event impossible ; and he was now as violently indignant at finding he was mistaken, as if his own conduct had given him all the right in the world to expect her eternal constancy.

Having favoured her with the expressive glance above mentioned, he got up, and walked out of the room. For a short period after his departure, Amelia felt the most triumphant certainty that her experiment had completely answered ; and her delight was only tempered by a sudden feeling of self-reproach for having never tested his attachment in the same manner before. It was indeed true, that no similar opportunity had ever occurred since their acquaintance began. But her honest conscience told her that this ought not to have prevented the experiment, for that it would have been easy enough to have invented an offer of marriage, without receiving it.

But neither her self-congratulations, nor her self-reproaches, could long make the absence of Lord William at such a moment endurable ; and perceiving that the game of chess ap-

peared to be going on with very earnest attention on both sides, she ventured to rise, and leave the room. It was not till she had endured some very painful moments of alarm, from the dreadful idea that Lord William had left the house never to re-enter it, that she discovered that he had in fact gone very little "farther than a wanton's bird," being parading, by the light of the moon, on a broad gravel-walk behind the house. It was the month of July, and the weather very fine, and therefore the beautiful Miss Thorwold, London-bred lady as she was, feared not, under the shelter of a garden shawl of Mrs. Knight's, which lay conveniently on the hall table, to sally forth, and brave the breeze of evening, and the angry gentleman together.

"You drive me to strange measures, my lord, in order to obtain five minutes' conversation with you," said she, coming upon him unexpectedly from under the shadow of the portico.

"The driving comes not from me, madam," he replied, with a good deal of melodramatic solemnity.

“Upon my word, Lord William, it will be quite too absurd if you and I can do nothing better to amuse ourselves in this charming sylvan retreat than get up a quarrel. Considering how short a time has elapsed since I had the honour of seeing you last, I cannot but think you have made great haste to grow disagreeable,” said she.

“The time has been long enough, Miss Thorwold, to enable you to do a great deal of business,” he replied. “Permit me to wish you joy.”

“Is it not a very strange caprice in fortune, that the only man in the whole world, who has the power of knowing how fearfully far I am at this moment from every feeling approaching joy,—is it not strange that *he* should be the first to utter the mocking word to me?” Amelia said this in a low, plaintive voice, which, under the circumstances, could hardly be listened to with indifference.

“Was it, then, to give me an opportunity of condoling with you, Miss Thorwold, that you invited me to make my appearance where I was to be greeted by tidings which

you well knew would stab me to the heart ? Was this generous, Amelia ?” returned his lordship.

“Would it have been more so,” she replied, trembling with anxiety for his answer, “would it have been more generous, Lord William, had I done nothing to give you notice of the misery which threatened me till it was too late, I mean till it had come upon me, and in a way to make my groaning under it a crime ? Is this what I ought to have done ?”

“No, Amelia, no !” he replied, taking her hand. “The stroke that has stunned me now, might have killed me then. But why, oh ! why is it necessary that I should hear such tidings at all ? If what you have just uttered be true. Forgive the doubt, but it is inevitable. If it be true that you contemplate this hateful marriage with dislike, why have you submitted to the infernal arrangement ? And knowing that you had so submitted, how could you have the barbarity to ask me to come for the express purpose of witnessing that which you perfectly

well knew would be more hateful to me than death."

"Why have I done this, Lord William? Why have I wished to see you once more before the doing so would be a sin? Can you ask me this?"

"But if your feelings, lovely, too lovely Amelia, are in truth such as your delicious words might lead me to hope," he replied, "why have you consented to accept this detestable alliance? Why had you not the courage to refuse him?"

Now this was a direct question to which it was not at all easy to give a direct answer, and Miss Thorwold had to draw her pocket-handkerchief from her pocket, and even use it, or seem to use it, for several seconds before she could give any answer at all; but at length she said, with a good deal of very pretty and proper reluctance: "It is far, very far from my inclination, Lord William, to say any thing which may seem to throw blame upon my uncle, but unfortunately it is impossible to answer your question without it. I was early left, as I believe you know, an orphan,

to his sole care and protection, and he has ever been, with one only exception, as kind and indulgent to me as possible, but that one exception has been the torment of my life. Unhappily for my peace and tranquillity I have had very many advantageous proposals of marriage, but hitherto, although not without a good deal of troublesome remonstrance, I have been permitted to refuse them all. But now it seems as if Lord Ripley were suddenly weary of the charge which these continued refusals appear likely to throw upon him permanently, for on hearing of Mr. Dermont's offer, and the splendid proposal for settlements which accompanied it, he is come down armed with all the authority his relationship gives him, and fully determined to use it for the purpose of forcing me to accept this young man. I have had recourse, as heretofore, to tears and entreaties, but now it is all in vain, and he has deliberately told me that if I still refuse to accept this young man, he shall send me to board with a methodistical old spinster cousin of my mother's, who lives in a little town in North Wales. All I could obtain was permission to postpone

giving my final answer till after Mrs. Knight's fête. Can you then wonder that I should at last hesitate? Can you wonder that this Welsh home should seem full of terror to me? Or can you wonder, Hammond, that, as I said before, I should wish to see you once more before it was a sin to do so?"

The most pathetic actress that ever lived could scarcely have spoken these sentences in a more touching manner than Miss Thorwold. She appeared to weep, but it was gentle, not violent weeping; the former being sure to touch and melt the heart of man, and the latter to revolt and harden it. And as she softly murmured these words, and softly wept, as an accompaniment, he (very softly too) permitted his arm to steal round her waist; and when she ceased he ventured, as the only consolation, perhaps, that he could offer, to draw her towards him, and to impress a very passionate kiss upon her lips.

It is possible that his lordship, though certainly possessing considerable experience, was not fully aware of the danger of giving way to tender feelings by moonlight, with a

nobly allied young lady for his companion; for before they returned into the house, he had done what, when he went out of it, he was very far from intending; he had, in short, with some few conditions annexed, rendered the fair Amelia the very happiest of women, by making her an offer, not only of his heart, but of his hand also.

A few moments of very ecstatic sensibility on both sides, followed this long wished for, and long-delayed proposal; and then the lady insisted upon it, despite all that the gentleman could urge to the contrary, that they should return to the drawing-room. As it now became quite evident that she was in earnest, he ceased his importunities to prevent it; but, as they were approaching the door, he detained her long enough under the portico which sheltered it, to exact from her a promise that she would not inform Mrs. Knight of what had passed between them, until after he should have had an opportunity of opening his heart respecting one or two particular circumstances necessary for her to know more fully than her prudish caution would now give her leisure to do.

With this request she promised scrupulously to comply ; and it was then arranged between them, that they should set out upon a tête-à-tête ramble in the grounds, immediately after breakfast on the morrow ; after which, he said, she should be at liberty to report his proposal both to her uncle and her friend.

Never, perhaps, had Amelia Thorwold looked so radiantly beautiful, as when, by the light of a few brilliant lamps, Lord William Hammond looked at her, for the first time, as his affianced wife. There was a sort of passionately tender triumph in her fine eyes, and a smile of such new-born happiness upon her lips, that the most indifferent of men could not have looked at her without admiration. Lord William was immeasurably far from being the most indifferent of men, and he certainly did think, as he watched the graceful movements of her perfect form, and the matchless loveliness of her charming face, that if beauty could excuse a man for committing matrimony, he might venture to stand forth as a Benedict before the assembled world.

Mrs. Knight, though still sitting before the chess-table, and having actually a piece in her hand, as if in act to move it, was roused to attention and to admiration, too, by the more than common charm of her look and manner. But although she had strong suspicions that all her own predictions had proved false, and that all the radiance which beamed from Amelia's face was produced by happy love, she was too faithful a confidante to say a word to Lord Ripley till she had been informed by words, as well as looks, that there was, indeed, something to tell. But, to say truth, she was dying with impatience, and the tea, and the wine and water, and the biscuits were all hurried over and despatched with unwonted celerity, so that Mrs. Knight and Miss Thorwold found themselves standing vis-à-vis on the top of the stairs, each with a bed-candle in her hand, in a wonderfully short time after the conclusion of the garden scene.

"Have you any thing to tell me, Amelia?" said Mrs. Knight, in an eager whisper. "But it is folly to ask—I know you have. Shall

I come with you into your room, or will you follow me to mine?"

"Neither, my dearest Mrs. Knight, neither!" replied Amelia, endeavouring not to smile. "I do assure you that I know nothing as yet. In short, there *is* nothing for me to say to you to-night—excepting that I am not absolutely without hope—only, dearest, you must do your best to engage Lord Ripley to-morrow morning. If you will manage to let Hammond and me have a tête-à-tête walk in the shrubberies to-morrow, I will confess to you that I do not think it impossible but I *may* have something to amuse you with before we ring for our Abigails at dressing time. But though I have nothing to tell, I have enough to think of, my dear friend, therefore give me a kiss, and wish me good night. If I *should* prove right, my dear, I hope you will not be *very* angry with me."

"At any rate, Amelia, I will endeavour to conquer my displeasure. But you are a tiresome girl not to tell me all now. Nevertheless, good night!" And the asked-for kiss was given and received, in the most affectionate style possible.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE appointed meeting, which was to afford the affianced lovers their promised tête-à-tête, was punctually kept on both sides; the gentleman, however, was, as he ought to have been, the first who arrived at the place of meeting, which was a pretty little grove, with a well-matted root-house in the middle of it, having a gray marble tombstone, erected to the memory of a favourite dog, placed at a little distance before it, as an object which might at once please the eye and touch the heart.

Within this pretty root-house, Lord William Hammond had placed himself in order to find shelter from “the orb of day,” as

well as from all other orbs which might chance to be curiously revolving in their orbits about the premises. As soon as he descried the waving garments of Amelia, as she entered by a path which gave her and her graceful movements fully to the view of any eyes within the root-house, he made a movement as if to meet her—but he thought better of it, and remaining still unseen himself, behind the rude trellis-work, which, by the help of woodbines and roses, sheltered the termination of the seat that surrounded the edifice, he indulged in a few minutes steady contemplation of her charming figure. A skilful interpreter of the expression of human features might, perhaps, have found in those of the noble lover as he gazed, something analogous to that of one deeply interested in the event of a race, and enjoying the advantage of seeing one of the intended performers in it, trotted out for his gratification.

If his examination of the fair creature approaching were, indeed, made after this critical manner, it is impossible but he must

have felt himself superlatively happy in the promised possession of such a gem. And, in truth, his lordship did, as he gazed, become more than ever convinced that Amelia Thorwold was, beyond all question, one of the loveliest women in creation.

This conviction was not only satisfactory, but exceedingly well timed ; for his lordship had not passed a night of unbroken sleep, but had, on the contrary, been tormented by many waking doubts, as to whether he had not been a most confounded fool to entangle himself at last. But now, the same feeling which had led him on to the desperate extremity of proposing marriage on the preceding evening, returned upon him in full force. In short, he admired the lady too much to relish the idea of her becoming the wife of any one else ; and having, at length, once again solemnly pledged his determination that this should not be, with all the solemnity that a deep imprecation could give, he started from his retreat, and stepped forth upon the mossy turf to meet her.

“ My loveliest Amelia ! ” he exclaimed, as

he again ventured to throw his arm around her, and led her to the sheltered seat he had left. "My loveliest Amelia! How vain, how utterly vain is every effort that the very wisest among us can make to resist fascination such as yours! It is scarcely possible, my dearest love, to imagine an act more utterly devoid of common sense, and common prudence, than my offering myself in marriage to you. I hope and trust my sweet friend, that you already know the lamentable fact, that I am, in fashionable phrase, an absolute beggar. I rather think, indeed, that the son of an English duke never does actually go, with his wife and family, into a workhouse; nor is it at all in the ordinary course of things, I fancy, that the niece of a viscount should do so either; and it is upon this sort of mysterious dependence, loveliest, that we must rest, for, upon the honour of a noble gentleman, I know of no other."

"It matters not," replied Amelia, suffering her beauteous head to drop upon his shoulder. "Such a dependence as you speak of, my dear lord, vague and mysterious as

you may think it, is a thousand times more to be depended on than one of the poor little gentry incomes of one or two thousand a year perhaps, which all the world are ready to declare *ought* to be enough, yet which never can by possibility be found so by people of any real fashion. If you are ready to take the chance which our mutual position gives us, of keeping our noble heads above water, I am. Nor would I change the prospect for any other that could be offered me !”

So noble a sentiment as this, could not, of course, be listened to with indifference by the happy man to whom it was addressed, and a few rapturous caresses were naturally the result of it. And then his lordship, rousing the sterner portion of his character to the performance of the task, for the sake of which the interview was appointed, withdrawing the arm which encircled his affianced bride, and contenting himself by retaining possession of her hand, said gravely, “Now, then, my dear Amelia, we must speak together frankly and rationally, as people

ought to do who have taken the desperate resolution of setting off together upon a very perilous expedition ; and I shall venture to do so with the more confidence of being listened to reasonably, because I feel that it is impossible I should mistake your motive for marrying me. You must love me for myself, because I frankly tell you that I have nothing else to offer."

These words produced a gentle pressure from the fair fingers of the delicate hand which were entwined with his, and having properly responded to this, he resumed the harangue, which for half an instant it had interrupted.

" Presuming, as I naturally must do," he said, " that this enchanting hypothesis is the true one, I have the less fear of telling you, sweetest, that our union must at first be strictly secret."

" Secret ?" repeated Miss Thorwold, a good deal startled. " *Private*, I presume you mean, my dear lord ?"

" No, my love," he replied, " I mean very literally what I say. If we marry at

all, my sweet Amelia, It must be *secretly*, and that to the very fullest extent of the term. You will not suspect that I mean to enact the part of a wicked hero in a romance, and intend to compass my wicked ends by means of a surreptitious marriage. That sort of stuff is not at all in our line, I should think. No, no, we will have our banns lawfully published in one of the large suburban parish churches, where even the aristocratic names of William Hammond and Amelia Thorwold, will be run over amidst scores of others, without exciting the least degree of dangerous attention in any of the worthy hearers. This accomplished, we will be married in the same church; and vitally important as it will be to me that our marriage should remain for the present concealed, I shall have no fear whatever that any tidings of it will reach our own circle from such a parish as I mention. At any rate, we must, if we venture to marry at all, venture also to run this risk."

"May I ask you, Lord William," replied Amelia, gravely, "what are the reasons

which render so very singular a proposal necessary ?”

“I should have hoped, dearest, that your confidence in me was such as would have rendered such a question unnecessary. And I confess, sweet love, that I think the perfect openness with which I have avowed to you the state of my affairs, ought to have made it so. Nevertheless, I am quite willing to prove still further, my dislike of all disguise between people who stand to each other in the relation that we hope to do. The reason, Amelia is, that my ducal brother has taken it into his head that I may, if I so please, obtain in marriage the magnificently wealthy hand of Miss Upton Savage.”

“Marry you to Miss Upton Savage !” exclaimed Amelia, vehemently. “Is it possible that your brother can have conceived the idea of so horrible a sacrifice. Why, my dearest Lord William ! the creature squints, besides that enormous quantity of fiery red hair. Marry Miss Upton Savage ! You must be jesting.”

“The subject has caused me too much

vexation, my love, to permit me to jest upon it. But I will fairly confess to you, that I think the proposal, on the part of my brother, that I should make so tremendous a sacrifice, is an unkindness, to say the very least of it, which fully justifies my playing him a little trick in return. He knows that I have debts to the amount of some thousands hanging over me—don't colour so violently at the name of debts, my dear love; be very sure that there is not a man of real fashion, throughout England, especially if he be a younger brother, who is *not* in debt. You really must not look so very rustic, as to appear frightened at that."

Amelia smiled sweetly as she listened to these words, and immediately recovered her composure.

"Well then, now that you look like yourself again," resumed her noble lover, "I will venture to go on. Watertown, as I have told you, my love, is aware of my embarrassments. He knows me well enough too, to be perfectly aware that even if I were capable of marrying that horrible queen of the witches,

Miss Upton Savage, I most certainly would not propose to her without acknowledging my debts, and I believe he suspects that such an avowal would not go far towards rendering the lovely creature propitious. Therefore, and with the hope of this delightful union before his eyes, he has generously signified to me his intention of helping me over this little difficulty, provided I will promise to propose to her as soon as this is done. To this proposal I have as yet returned no answer, having determined to prove to him by my silence the indignation which I felt. But now I certainly feel greatly inclined to accept it, by telling him that on condition of his paying my debts I am ready to promise that I will offer myself, such as I am, to the heiress. I will not deny, dear Amelia, that his grace is tolerably correct in believing that the charmer has already given reason enough for me to suppose that she would make no difficulty of accepting me, such as I am now, though I do not suspect she will be likely to inspire you with any jealous uneasiness from the fear of my offering myself to her such as I shall

be when these debts are paid, provided, dearest, that you will consent to make a married man of me in the interval. But if this is to be done I need not, I think, point out to you any farther the dire necessity of its being done secretly."

Lord William ceased, but Miss Thorwold did not reply. She was in truth dreadfully shocked and disappointed. She certainly loved Lord William as much as she was capable of loving any thing, and this included a very considerable degree of passionate fondness. But it was not only to the gratification of her affection that she had looked, when she so ardently entered upon the project of eliciting from his reciprocal affection an offer of marriage.

She had spoken truly when she said, in describing Lord William Hammond to Mrs. Knight, that he was "the darling of Almack's, the pride of the park, the glory of the drawing-room, the pet of the boudoir, and the sovereign of the Opera;" he really was all this, and it cannot be denied that the idea of all the envy she should inspire by

becoming the wife of all this, had some share in the vehement desire which she felt for obtaining the honour.

But how was this dearly valued triumph to be obtained were she to consent to marry secretly? The assurance, though from such very good authority, that the object of her affections was a beggar, produced little or no effect in checking her ardent wish for the connexion, for she had faith unbounded in that mysterious power before alluded to, by which the brothers of dukes and the nieces of viscounts are protected from the matter-of-fact evils of poverty; but the marrying secretly was almost to put herself beyond the reach of this benign influence, and for a few moments she was too much confounded to be capable of replying.

“ You will not speak to me, Amelia?” said Lord William, in a tone which had less of wounded tenderness than of offended pride in it. “ Then I think it will be better for us both that this interview should end, and not this interview only, but all reference to the subject which led to it. Nothing, Miss

Thorwold, nothing but a very passionate degree of attachment on both sides could possibly render such a proposal as I have made to you endurable to either of us. Believe me, you cannot be more aware than I am, that we may both of us do better in a worldly point of view, than by indulging our affections, shut ourselves out for a time at least from all those pleasures of society which I believe we are both of us particularly well calculated to enjoy. I tell you no more than the truth when I declare to you, that I have never seen a woman whom I have admired as much as I do you, and the proposal I have made, however far it may be from what you have a right to expect, shows the strength of the sentiment you have inspired vastly more than any ordinary, every-day sort of offer could do, made by a man without embarrassments, and having no reason in the world why he should not indulge himself by asking the woman he preferred to become his wife. However, I beg to assure you that it is not my intention, Miss Thorwold, to attempt winning you by

importunity. I feel that I have given you proof of a degree of love that most people might think amounted to madness. And I am by no means sure that I am not of that opinion myself. Perhaps, were you to give me a proof of equal love, people might say that you were mad too. I put the question before you very plainly, Amelia, and all I can do beyond this is leaving the power of deciding upon it in your hands instead of my own."

Whether the cavalier tone of this speech was the genuine result of the gentleman's own temper, or only assumed in consequence of his sagacious perception of that of the lady, must be left in doubt, but in either case its effect was all he could desire, for it left the beautiful Amelia firmly resolved to do every thing he asked her, whether madly or not, rather than run the risk of losing him, and of being left to that detested "doing better," to which he had alluded, for both of them.

But she was too highly finished a woman of bon ton to pronounce such a decision im-

mediately, unless absolutely driven to it by necessity, and she therefore replied, in a voice of melting softness, "If I feel averse to accepting a proposal which has all the rashness, as well as all the courage of irresistible attachment in it, Lord William, you ought to be aware that it is as much for your sake as my own. Tell me, dearest friend, might not our union take place under circumstances less objectionable, if it were delayed for a month or two?"

"Beyond all question such delay would show our wisdom," replied his lordship, suddenly rising, "and I have only to apologise for having suffered passion so greatly to obscure that respectable quality, as to have hazarded the proposal which has so much shocked and offended you."

And, in saying this, his lordship put himself in the position and attitude proper for immediate retreat.

Though the existence of the fair Amelia had not passed without some little difficult points, which required ready wit to get over,

she had never before found herself called upon to act with promptitude, decision, and skill, so much as at this moment.

This was not the first time that very unequivocal love-making had taken place between the parties; but it was the first time in which any thing at all approaching to an offer of marriage had been the consequence, and Amelia now felt a degree of terror at the idea that this offer, so long, so anxiously, so almost despairingly looked for, should now *come to nothing*, though it *was* come at last, which almost overwhelmed her faculties, and threw her into a state of agitation which it required a very powerful effort to overcome. This effort, however, was not wanting, but was made, on the contrary, with a degree of resolute firmness which indicated considerable force of character.

Not for a moment, not for half a moment, did Amelia remain under the paralysing effects of an emotion too strong to leave her power to act, and no sooner had this rapid sensation passed than she was herself again, and sufficiently mistress of her looks, words,

YOUNG LOVE.

tely, unless absolutely driven to it.

YOUNG LOVE.

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There was no particular expression in the glance he gave her in

"Amen!" he exclaimed—

"Why, then, do you call
Have I not offered to you
mine, my rank? Have I not
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in a way to make me indeed
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and actions, to give her a very fair chance of bringing matters once more to the point at which she had so rashly given her lover reason to think that he might draw back again if he would.

“Stay, Hammond! stay!” she exclaimed, in a voice of agony. “Oh! do not torture thus a heart that loves you! Oh! Lord William! can you indeed leave me to the detested fate with which I am threatened—threatened! Oh, more than threatened, William! As surely as I live I shall be forced into the arms of that detested man, if you do not interfere to prevent it!”

And here, having wound her arms round him to prevent his escape, she sunk on the rude floor at his feet, and, throwing off the bonnet which had become accidentally untied, her beautiful hair fell in a waving shower upon her shoulders, while her arms clasped his knees, and her beautiful eyes were thrown up to his with a glance of the most passionate tenderness.

He looked down upon her for a moment in silence, but she had the satisfaction of per-

ceiving that there was no particular expression of coldness in the glance he gave her in return.

“Interfere, Amelia!” he exclaimed—
“Cruel girl! What, then, do you call interference? Have I not offered to you my hand, my name, my rank? Have I not offered all—all that fate and fortune have left me? And how have you received the offer? Was it in a way to make me indeed believe myself beloved?”

“Forgive me! Dearest, and only beloved, forgive me! I know not what I said! But I unsay it all; if, indeed, my words so belied my heart as to make you doubt the sincerity of my love. Oh, Hammond! Hammond! must I be the wife of another? Must other arms than yours enclose me?” This touching appeal was answered by Lord William’s raising her in his arms, and very tenderly embracing her, an act which she now seemed too plaintively submissive either to resist or resent.

“Let us not torture ourselves any farther, my lovely girl!” he exclaimed. “I would

that I had a throne, Amelia, that I might place you on it beside me. But such wishes, as you well know, love, are all in vain. There is one way, and one way only, in which I may make you my wife; and if, indeed, you love me one half as passionately as I adore you, I cannot believe that you will refuse me. Say but that you consent, Amelia! Say but that you will submit, for a while, to hide this lovely form from every eye but mine, and I will not lose an hour in making such arrangements as shall secure our happiness beyond the power of fate. Speak, my love, will you be my secret bride?—my hidden treasure?—the hoarded joy of my existence?"

"Oh, William! William!" she replied, "I have no prudence left. I have struggled hard, and done my very best to be discreet; but it is all in vain; one word, one look from you can overthrow all my wisdom. Yes, dearest, yes! I am willing to become your wife, as secretly as the solemn nature of the act will permit."

"And my adoration, sweetest, shall, if pos-

sible, be proportionate to the blessing you bestow. And now, then, my beautiful, let us examine a little what it will be necessary to do, in order for me to possess my promised treasure as speedily as possible. Do you not think that, in the humour your uncle seems to be in, at hearing of this young squire's proposal, you could extract thirty or forty pounds from him, on pretence of wanting to refresh your wardrobe for the fêtes which are doubtless about to be given in the neighbourhood? Do you not think that, on such a plea, he would be somewhat more than usually generous, Amelia?"

"I think he might," she replied, laughing. "It would be so shocking, you know, if I were obliged to appear shabbily dressed before the eyes of my future papa and mamma-in-law."

"Oh! horrible, my love. In short, I shall reckon upon you for a little aid in that line; and I shall work my respected brother a little in the same way. For, over and above the promised liquidation of my debts,

he really must assist me in my efforts to make a decent appearance in the eyes of the charming Miss Upton Savage. In this way, I have no doubt that we shall muster a hundred or two—quite enough, my lovely one, to make us supremely happy till these debts of mine are paid—our marriage announced, and we started fresh, by the aid of our nobility and our rich relatives.”

This last gay phrase sufficed at once to set at rest a vile little swarm of stinging anxieties concerning her own debts, which from time to time, in the intervals of her tender ecstasies, had been buzzing about the heart of the fair Amelia.

“By aid of our nobility,” thought she, “it will be easy enough, I question not, to keep my dog-like creditors at bay. Tradespeople are notoriously the most interested and money-loving set of monsters on the earth. And I should like to see them making an enemy of the elegant Lady William Hammond—niece to Lord Ripley—sister to the Duke of Watertown, the mirror of fashion and the queen of beauty.”

These thoughts so gladdened her heart, that her eyes shot forth their beams amidst a burst of laughter, as she replied, "I have no fears at all for the future, dearest! You are the only younger child, you know: and all the world says, that my lady duchess your mother, had a very handsome fortune, which, of course, must come to you. This prospect will be quite sufficient to reconcile my uncle to the match, whenever it suits your convenience to make it known to him. And then, of course, he must do something for me."

This "something of course" had most assuredly not been overlooked by Lord William, any more than the duchess's jointure had by the beautiful Amelia. But on his side Lord William happened to know that he had already pretty well forestalled all that was to come to him upon her grace's demise, by means of taking up money upon the reversion at enormous interest. And on her side the charming Amelia was pretty tolerably sure that, beyond a few hundred pounds, perhaps, for finery, her noble uncle

would never bestow upon her another sou, provided the disgrace of her going to a workhouse, would fall first upon her noble family, before it could come to him. They had, however, something much more agreeable and animating to talk about than correcting each other's financial errors concerning their respective relations. For all the dear details of the secret marriage were to be canvassed and arranged.

"And now, my fairest, let us come a little to particulars, as to how we can best arrange this most delicious scheme," said Lord William, replacing her upon the mossy bench, and once again encircling her slender waist with his arm. "Tell me, have you any attached trustworthy friend in London? A humble friend will suit our purpose best. Tell me, love, do you know any such person?"

"Indeed I do," replied Amelia, remembering her favourite, Mrs. Stedworth, with infinite satisfaction. "I know one of the very best creatures that ever lived, and one too so affectionately attached to me, that I

believe there is nothing I could ask her to do, which she would refuse."

"That's well," returned his lordship, "and do you think, Amelia, that you can rely upon her faith as steadfastly as on her affection? In short, do you think she may be safely trusted with a secret on which so much depends?"

"Indeed, I do! Besides, she is a person who gains her living by being considered as trustworthy; and should she prove false to us, I have influence enough to ruin her already, as she well knows, and she has quite good sense enough to perceive that I am not likely to have less by becoming your wife. Oh, yes, I am quite sure we may trust her," cried the confiding Amelia.

"Gains her living by being considered as trustworthy?" repeated Lord William, with an odd sort of expression of countenance. "What species of trust is it, Miss Thorwold, that ladies of fashion repose in a person who, by your account, exists by keeping their secrets?"

Amelia laughed. "Oh, you abominable

man!" she replied. "How impossible it is for a woman to speak to a person so superlatively wicked as you are, without danger. But set your mind at rest, my dear Othello, upon the nature of the confidences existing between poor dear Mrs. Stedworth and her fashionable friends. It is not only of a nature perfectly innocent, but extremely meritorious into the bargain. I dare say that, like all the other men in the world, you occasionally indulge yourself in philippics against the wasteful extravagance of women of fashion in the article of dress; but I declare to you, that though we think it more dignified and proper to keep the matter rather secret, we ought to be considered as the most condescendingly prudent, provident, and economical creatures in the world, solely upon the strength of what Mrs. Stedworth could testify in our favour, if we chose to let her talk about it. What think you, my dear lord, of our rarely making up our innocent young hearts to the bold measure of purchasing an expensive new dress without taking measures to meet the demand

upon our poor, dear little purses by the sale of an old one? It is true, upon my honour, Lord William, and this good woman is *the* individual, par excellence, to whom we all apply on such occasions."

"I have heard something of the kind before," said Lord William, with a playful smile, "and I can easily imagine that such a person may make an exceedingly useful acquaintance. But how do you mean to employ her on the present occasion, dearest? Has she a sort of dwelling that might serve us as a temporary residence?"

"Exactly that, my dear friend. Her house is an extremely respectable looking abode, and the letting a part of it is, I know, occasionally a source of profit to her. But the great advantage I anticipate from my acquaintance with this excellent creature," pursued Amelia, "is the being able to take refuge with her when I leave Mrs. Knight. For, of course, under our present circumstances, it would not do for me to ask for hospitality from any of my fashionable friends."

“ Gracious Heaven, no !” returned Lord William, in an accent which showed how greatly he seemed likely to value the safe-keeping of their secret.

“ If this woman be really such a person as you describe, she will be invaluable to us, Amelia. I will arrange every thing relative to our marriage, and will take care to sleep the necessary number of nights in the parish where I intend the banns shall be published. Published, dearest, exactly to those who shall hear and not understand. I will manage all that. But it is you, my love, who must arrange the mode by which you think you may best elude all eyes and ears for a month or two. I should think, however, that the safest thing would be for you to go abroad—for us both to go abroad, I mean, as soon as we are married ; that is, provided you know any one whom you can mention to your uncle, Mrs. Knight, et cætera, as having invited you.”

“ I understand. Yes, it certainly would be best—and I have but one objection to it,” replied Amelia. “ The truth is, Lord Wil-

liam, that I positively dare not confess to my uncle, and his dear friend, Mrs. Knight, that I have decided upon refusing Mr. Dermont. I am quite positive that I should never get another sixpence from Lord Ripley—that is, as long as he is kept in ignorance of my marriage with you. If you thought I might venture to take them into our confidence, all would be easy enough.”

“Impossible!” cried Lord William, again starting up, and thereby throwing Miss Thorwold into a new agony of terror, lest she should lose him. “Impossible, Amelia! If you persist in recommending this, I must, passionately as I adore you, rouse up my courage to the bidding you an eternal farewell. I have told you already, with the most perfect confidence, that ruin, irretrievable ruin would fall upon me did my obstinate and obdurate brother only suspect that I thought of marrying any other than Miss Upton Savage. I cannot, I will not risk this; and it is as much for your sake as my own that I refuse to do so. Either swear to me that you will have no other

confidant than the woman you mention—who I doubt not is sufficiently in the habit of keeping secrets of all kinds to make her well-paid promise safe—either do this, or give me one last kiss, and let me leave you for ever.”

“ No, Lord William, no!—you shall not leave me. I will promise every thing, risk every thing, even life itself, rather than lose you! Only tell me exactly what you wish me to do, and I swear to you that it shall be done, let the danger and difficulty be what they may.”

Such a declaration could only be answered as Lord William answered it. And, after the tender emotion produced by this little scene had subsided, they both set themselves to talk very quietly over the minute particulars of the rather thorny enterprise which they were about to enter upon. It was not very easy to make out the whole plan so clearly and practically coherent, as to avoid all risk of blundering when it came to be put in action; but it really seemed as if they were both gifted by nature with precisely

such a spirit of intrigue as that which runs in so brilliant a manner through the generality of French farces, by which obstacles are converted into aids, and difficulties of all kinds vanish like the vapours of morning before the influence of the all-conquering sun. In another half-hour, every particular was completely arranged.

Lord William failed not again to impress upon the mind of his devoted Amelia, that the first active step she had to take was the attack on the purse of Lord Ripley.

“ I am horridly hard up, my sweet love,” said he, “ and we therefore must both of us exert our skill in the extracting process. Lovers, you know, are said to feel singular delight from contriving to employ themselves exactly in the same way, at the same moment—by looking at the moon, or kissing a rose-bud, or some such pretty foolery. And may not we, dearest, indulge our fond fancies exactly in the same manner? We have agreed, you know, that I am to receive a letter by the twelve o’clock post to-day, obliging me to set off by the mail to-night,

in consequence of an earnest summons from my sick mother. I shall arrive early to-morrow morning in London, where his grace of Watertown still lingers, and trust me that if, exactly as the clock strikes two, you request a few minutes' private conversation with your uncle, and having obtained it, will forthwith proceed to work upon his feelings with all the skill you have, in order to convince him of the necessity of advancing a little ready money to enable you to make a decent appearance in the eyes of the wealthy personage you are about to marry—if you will do this, my sweet Amelia, we may both derive all the pleasure which the consciousness of being similarly engaged can bestow.”

This was answered by so charming a smile as to suffice both as an offering to his wit, and a testimony of her admiring tenderness. And thus they went on, till it was fully time to think about dressing for dinner, pleasantly rehearsing plans which, as they will be brought before the reader in action, need not detain him any longer now.

It was fortunate for Lord William Hammond, and Miss Thorwold, that the uncle, and the friend of the latter, happened to have engaged again immediately after luncheon in another very interesting game of chess, which lasted till the half-hour bell gave them also notice that it was time to dress for dinner. And thus the long absence of the lovers happily escaped all commentary.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. KNIGHT'S party was exceedingly like most other parties, delighting some, displeasing others, and fatiguing all. Amelia, however, had a game to play, which being one of considerable importance, kept her *wide awake* to the very last moment that the company remained together. Miss Thorwold was, in fact, too happy, too triumphant, to feel fatigue, and the necessity she had been under, from the moment her favoured lover had left the house, of acting a difficult, a very difficult part, so far from wearing out her spirits seemed only to invigorate them.

To Alfred her conduct was equally safe and judicious. She received him, as well as

his father and mother, with an air of the most flattering distinction, and was even politely civil to Julia, whom the colonel had insisted upon bringing, despite her earnest assurances that she would rather stay at home.

But when the enamoured young man implored his Amelia to afford him a few minutes' private conversation, she had entreated him, in a manner which showed a bewitching consciousness of her own too great susceptibility, *to spare her*, at a moment when so many eyes were upon them! "I will not affect," she said, "to misunderstand you, and I should be sorry to believe that you could misunderstand me, but this is no time to explain ourselves further."

To her uncle she had addressed herself with equal skill and equal success. A draft for fifty pounds was the reward of her assuring him that all his trouble on her account would speedily be at an end, as the romance of her life, like that of every one's else, would soon terminate in the old-fashioned catastrophe of marriage.

To Mrs. Knight, when questioned, as of course she was very eagerly at the very first moment that found them alone together, after the sudden departure of Lord William, she replied by the seemingly plain, but really equivocal words: "All doubts about my final destination are at end now, my dearest Mrs. Knight, and you shall know every particular of my decisive conversation with Lord William; I shall not have the least scruple of repeating it to you, word for word, but it must not be now. I have suffered a good deal, I assure you, but it is all over and ended for ever. Were I, however, to go over it all again with you, I am quite certain that I should be perfectly unable to appear at your fête. Only let me assure you, without further discussion of the subject, that you cannot be more aware of the wisdom of my marrying than I am myself, and I have perfectly made up my mind that I will marry with as little loss of time as possible. You may depend upon it, my dear friend, that the time will come when I shall be delighted to talk over every thing

with you at full length, if you will let me; but for the present I shall only try to enjoy myself as much as I can."

Mrs. Knight looked and felt a good deal puzzled, but she knew her beautiful friend too well to believe that she would be likely to grow more communicative upon being requested to do so, and she therefore submitted to receive all she chose to say, without asking for more—a degree of forbearance which was the less difficult, because she felt persuaded that the business would end by Amelia's becoming the wife of Mr. Alfred Dermont, which, after all, was vastly more important than any communications she could possibly make respecting what had passed between her and Lord William Hammond, and so far all went well.

And then came the much more difficult business of announcing and arranging her departure. Lord Ripley had declared his intention of leaving Crosby on the morning after the fête, and of course his fair niece determined upon remaining there till after his departure. But the interval was not lost,

for it enabled her both to write to Mrs. Stedworth, and to receive her answer, which answer being in every way what she wished, rendered the expedition she meditated a much less nervous business than it would otherwise have been.

The post which arrived a few hours after the departure of her uncle brought her not only Mrs. Stedworth's epistle, but another which the fair heroine took care to open and read in the presence of Mrs. Knight, and while doing so she permitted a good deal of painful emotion to become visible.

"What have you got there, Amelia?" said her attentive friend. "It is very unusual to see you look so unbecomingly doleful about any thing."

"And it is very unusual," replied Miss Thorwold, "to receive such extremely unpleasant news. My poor friend, Caroline Marchmont, is declared to be in a very dangerous state; her lungs are thought to be affected, and I believe they are going to take her abroad. Poor dear girl! I cannot but feel this as a heavy misfortune at such a

moment. She is the only person of my own age that I ever formed any real intimacy with, and she would have been the greatest comfort possible to me just now. I had quite determined to go to her for a little while, the moment the time of my marriage was finally settled. It is a great, a very great disappointment to me."

Mrs. Knight smiled—she did rather more than smile, she very nearly laughed heartily, upon which Miss Thorwold looked at her with great indignation. "I have always thought," she said bitterly, "that a girl so young and lovely as Caroline, was not very likely to be a favourite with you, Mrs. Knight—female youth and beauty not being exactly what you are likely to pet most. But I confess I did not quite expect so very unfeeling a mark of your antipathy as you have now given. I shall be much obliged by your permitting me either to walk in the grounds, or to remain alone in my own room for the rest of the evening."

"Upon my word, Amelia, you are very ridiculous, and very incomprehensible," re-

turned Mrs. Knight, looking as if doubtful whether she should laugh or be angry. "As if I had not heard you abuse Caroline Marchmont a hundred times! You know, my dear, there is nothing which amuses me so much as affectation. But pray do not let us quarrel. And, in order to prevent it, you shall have patent right to walk, and to sit, upon Salisbury Plain, if you should chance to prefer it as a scene of sentiment to my poor drawing-room."

Miss Thorwold rose without uttering a word in reply, and walked out of the room. It was rather later than usual on the following morning, when Mrs. Knight descended to the breakfast-parlour; but, nevertheless, she was in no degree surprised at not finding Amelia there, as that fair creature was rather more than ordinarily partial to the soft and soothing qualities of a down pillow, and seldom left her room till drawn thence by a positive summons to the breakfast-table.

"Let Miss Thorwold be told that breakfast is ready," said Mrs. Knight.

The man who received this command re-

turned in a wondrously short space of time, almost so short, indeed, as to suggest the idea that the information he brought had been longer in his possession than he chose to confess ; but be this as it may, he re-entered the breakfast-room, with a countenance of very theatric astonishment, and stammering out the words " Miss Thorwold is no where to be found, ma'am," handed a salver to his mistress with a letter upon it, adding, as she took it up, " That note, ma'am, was found upon her dressing-table."

Their little quarrel of the evening before immediately recurred to Mrs. Knight's recollection, and remembering the sort of terror in which her dear friend, Lord Ripley, seemed to live, for fear his beautiful niece should get into mischief, which might entail blame upon him, she exclaimed as she broke open the seal, " That horrid girl was born to be my torment!" A persuasion which probably was not altogether removed when she read the following lines :

"I can scarcely imagine any thing, Mrs. Knight, that could induce me to risk that

most vulgar of all adventures, a quarrel; but no extent of lady-like philosophy can, I am afraid, so completely still the temper (we will not say soothe it), as to prevent very painful sensations from arising when we meet with what is either rude or unfeeling. You will scarcely deny that I last night met with both from you. To avoid a repetition of this, I have determined to leave your house to-morrow morning, which will insure my escape from the double danger of showing resentment for what is past, and of suffering in the same way in future. Think not, however, that I have any intention or wish to sacrifice your pleasant society for ever. This is by no means the case. I purpose visiting the friend whose dangerous illness caused your unseemly mirth, and shall very probably accompany her abroad for a few weeks. The matrimonial prospects which are opening before me will, of course, account for the tone of independence as to my movements, which I consider myself called upon to assume. You will, I am sure, for the sake of more than one friend, explain *pro-*

perly to the family at the Mount the cause of my sudden departure. I sincerely hope we may meet again, under circumstances which shall enable us both to forget, in the most pleasant manner possible, the disagreeable scene which caused our separation. Yours, with unfailing consideration,

“AMELIA THORWOLD.”

That Miss Thorwold had indeed left the house, and that her trunks had already been sent for, from the little way-side public-house, from which the omnibus to the London railroad departed three times a-day, was easily ascertained by a few inquiries. But although that much was perfectly clear, and admitted of no mistake, Mrs. Knight still remained in a state of very tormenting uncertainty concerning the real motives of her late guest. No lady could have a much worse opinion of the temper of another, than Mrs. Knight had of that of Miss Thorwold; nevertheless, she could not “realise” the fact of her having been so deeply wounded, because her vehement expressions of sorrow

for the illness of Miss Caroline Marchmont had been met by a laugh.

That this rival beauty really was very ill, and had been ordered to a milder climate, she knew to be true, a correspondent of her own having mentioned it in a letter received by the early post that morning; but although a good deal of young-lady intimacy had existed between the beauties, Mrs. Knight remembered nothing in their intercourse which rendered such a proposal from Miss Thorwold at all probable. Yet how was it possible to substitute any other history for the one she had received? She certainly did remember the long rambles taken by Amelia and Lord William, which, from the little which the lady had said about it since, had, she had every reason to believe, terminated by at length convincing her that nothing beyond very idle gallantry was to be hoped for from him. Yet, even if she were mistaken in this, and that these long interviews had led to an explicit declaration, how was it possible to suppose that a gentleman of forty, and a lady of thirty, should think it necessary

to elope in order to become man and wife, when they both of them knew that there was nothing on earth to prevent their marrying whenever they pleased, such an event having, in fact, been often thought very probable by the friends on both sides.

But far more unlikely still did she think it, that Miss Thorwold should be guilty of any worse indiscretion. She had no doubt that Amelia liked Lord William Hammond better than any one else, but very far indeed was she from believing that any liking would induce her to sacrifice for its gratification her position in the world.

In short, after exerting her very acute faculties to the utmost to divine the real state of the case, she came at last to the conclusion that Amelia, finding that there was no chance of her ever becoming Lady William Hammond, had at length made up her mind to accept the hand of her younger lover; but that, still feeling his juvenile addresses to be a great bore, she had taken advantage of their last night's disagreement in order to ensure herself a release from it for a week or two.

She felt, indeed, that it was not unlikely that the self-willed beauty might think a week or two passed on the continent, though even with a sick friend, would be better than any more long visitations to the Mount, and on this point she was so well disposed to agree with her, that she amiably determined to plead her cause with her uncle, and make him agree with herself in thinking that, provided she consented to take the young gentleman at last, it was but fair to let her indulge herself in this last little spinster freak with impunity.

Before writing to Lord Ripley, however, in this amiable conciliatory spirit, she thought it would be as well to ascertain, beyond the possibility of blunder, on what terms she had parted with Alfred, and, for this purpose, she ordered her carriage at an hour that would bring her at the sure-to-be-at-home moment of luncheon to the Mount. As she approached the house she perceived the young man wandering in a very penseroso manner beneath some trees, which formed a pretty little grove at no great distance from the road.

Aware that she should have a much better chance of learning how matters really stood from Alfred than from his mother, she immediately stopped the carriage, got out of it, and joined him.

He changed colour as he saw her approach, and his handsome features expressed a feeling of uneasiness which, for the moment, alarmed her a good deal, but when they were near enough for him to extend his hand to welcome her, the manner in which he did this, and the tone in which he exclaimed, "Alone!" convinced her that all was, as yet, safe and well.

"Yes, I am alone, my dear Alfred!" she said, with an affectionate familiarity of manner which in an instant brought a smile of hope and gladness to his lips. "I am alone," she continued, "but there is nothing to cause uneasiness to any friend of my dear absent Amelia." And then, putting her arm with a charming elder-sister sort of intimacy under his, she added, "You must forgive me if I take too much for granted, dear Alfred, what I so ardently desire should be true. Tell me

at once, am I right in believing that you love my darling Amelia?"

"Love her, Mrs. Knight! Do I love her?" cried the enamoured youth. And no doubt it would have been a great relief to him could he have taken the liberty of exclaiming, "Oh earth! oh heaven! bear witness," and so forth; but he very judiciously stopped short in his rhapsody, and gently pressing her arm, added, "Never can I thank you enough, my dearest Mrs. Knight, for permitting me to tell you that I love, that I adore her! But why are you alone? Almost the last words which Amelia said to me, at Crosby, conveyed the delicious hope that she consented to listen to me; that she intended, angelic creature! to listen to me favourably. And it was my hope, this very day, to have thrown myself at her feet, and to have told her what, however, she knows full well already, that life would not be worth having unless blessed with the hope of possessing her."

"And your parents, dear Alfred?" said Mrs. Knight, with affectionate solicitude. "You must remember, my dear young friend,

that although our Amelia is no wealthy heiress, her noble connexions, her unequalled beauty, her adorable character, her charming talents, all conspire to make her friends expect that she shall be welcomed warmly by whatever family the affections of her heart may incline her to enter. Unless Colonel and Mrs. Dermont cordially unite their wishes with yours, Alfred, you must prepare yourself for the most positive refusal. No, Amelia might, from the tenderness of her nature, sink into an early grave from disappointed love, but never would she enter a family which refused to welcome her with the warm affection which she must be conscious she so well deserves."

"Refuse? Oh! my dearest Mrs. Knight! you do not know my father and mother, or you would not for an instant believe such unnatural conduct possible. They know my presumptuous hopes. I have no secrets hidden from them, and as I have often told them of faults and follies, of which, doubtless, I ought to have been ashamed, I could not delay the acknowledgment of a sentiment which must

ever be the pride as well as the happiness of my life. But why, oh ! why are you alone ?”

To this anxious question Mrs. Knight replied by giving a very touching description of the strong affection which bound together the hearts of Amelia Thorwold, and her fair but fading friend. If Alfred had required any additional charm to captivate his heart, he might have found it in the touching description given by Mrs. Knight of the devotion of Amelia to this lovely friend. “At such a moment too!” said she, “when prospects of a happy life of mutual affection seem opening before her. To tear herself away at such a moment is what very few young creatures would have courage to do. But Amelia Thorwold is a noble being !”

The lover and the friend, having indulged themselves for a few moments longer in exchanging exclamations of admiration and affection for the divine Amelia, entered the house together, arm in arm, and with an air of such very confidential good understanding, that Julia, who was passing through the hall at the moment, felt aware, at the very first

glance she gave them, that every thing was explained, acknowledged, and settled between them.

Mrs. Knight permitted her horses to be put up, confessing that she came predetermined to take luncheon with them; and adding, in a little whisper audible to every body, "That when that necessary business should be over, she had just five words that she wanted to say to Colonel and Mrs. Dermont, by themselves." In order to give these five important words the more solemnity, Colonel Dermont led the way to his library, and the confidential trio continued to be shut up there till Mrs. Knight had managed to learn the exact amount of Colonel Dermont's income, the noble allowance of above one-half of it which he intended immediately to settle on his son, the liberal settlement of five hundred a year pin-money, and fifteen hundred a year jointure, which he proposed to make on Miss Thorwold, and finally, the proffer which he and Mrs. Dermont intended to make the young couple, of giving up the Mount to them as a residence,

if they wished it. In short, it was impossible that, save by the performance of the marriage ceremony, the match between Alfred Dermont and Miss Thorwold could be more completely settled and arranged, than it was before Mrs. Knight took her leave.

While this interesting conversation was going on in the library, Julia and Alfred remained tête-à-tête in the dining-room. She had made a movement to leave it as soon as she thought the retreating party had passed through the hall, but Alfred had stopped her.

“ Oh, Julia ! do not go ! Cease to be so cruelly unkind to me ! ” he said. “ At this happy, happy moment, the happiest perhaps that I have ever known, do not let me see your eyes turned from me with unkindness. I know I have been angry with you, Julia, very angry, for you were harsh to my idolised Amelia ; and as long as I remained tortured by doubt, I was in no humour to make it up with you. But now that I have at last received the blessed confirmation of all my fondest hopes, I can no longer bear that my

dear play-fellow, my dear adopted sister, should look upon me coldly. Forgive me, dearest Julia! Forgive us both if we have misconstrued your manner. My sweet Amelia was wounded, because, of course, she wished you to love her, and she could not but feel that if you did love her, you would not have passed so severe a judgment on her surely pardonable thoughtlessness, in continuing to play at that foolish game so long with me. But look at me as you used to do, Julia, or I shall scarcely be able to feel quite happy, even though I have just been told, on such excellent authority, that Amelia loves me."

Julia, for a moment, closed her eyes, and felt in her heart a wish, most terribly sincere, that she might never open them again. There was something in the words and manner of Alfred so different from any thing she had ever perceived before—the heedless, reckless tone of the spoilt boy was so completely gone, and a softness so new, so touching, and, all things considered (or rather all things felt), so terrible, that to bear it

all with proper steadiness and composure seemed totally beyond her power.

But there is no feeling in an unspoiled female heart more powerful than the instinctive delicacy which makes her dread, like death, the betrayal of a love that has never been sought. At that moment, death would most certainly have been welcomed as a blessing by Julia—but it was not at her command. She had to live, to open her eyes again, to look in the face of Alfred, to know that he was looking at her expressly to find out what was passing in her heart, and then she had to speak, and in such a manner as to convince him that she loved him like a sister, and a very happy one, of course, seeing that he was so superlatively happy.

Could she do all this? Was it possible? No, it was not. Women are often accused, and often with justice, of being artful; but nobody seems to remember, when this is predicated of them as a fault, that, were it otherwise, they must often be guilty of another fault, which would generally be

considered as more odious still. For what woman ever did betray love for a man who had not first betrayed that he loved her, without making herself justly liable to that most painful of all accusations, a want of delicacy? Poor souls! How may they safely steer their course between the two? When one sees a thoughtless, heedless, giddy young creature, who in all else wears her heart upon her sleeve, when we see such a one deluding the lynx-like eye of vanity itself, and maintaining an aspect of cold indifference beside the man she loves, is it fair to scorn her for being artful? All that poor Julia had to save her now, was making a desperate effort to be artful—and she did make it, and with such success, that she had the comfort, the great, the immense, the unspeakable comfort of seeing Alfred look at her without having the slightest trace upon his features of guessing what was passing at her heart. “Dear Alfred!” she said, “if you fancy that I have either looked or spoke as if I were cross, you must forgive me, —you must indeed; for who ever looked

or spoke otherwise, when suffering as I have done, from toothache? I do wish you all happiness, my dearest Alfred ; but if you know how dreadfully painful it was to me to speak at all, I am quite sure you would take it for granted, as you ought to do, and not wish me to talk about it."

Julia not only said all this, but she said it with such *consummate art*, that Alfred had not the least doubt but that she was, and had been, suffering dreadfully from toothache. Was Julia less loveable, or more so, for thus suddenly becoming an adept in this most reprobated feminine accomplishment?

CHAPTER X.

CONSIDERING that Miss Thorwold had never before travelled without attendance, she suffered wonderfully little inconvenience in transferring herself from Crosby to Mrs. Stedworth's house in Half-Moon-street, Piccadilly. Miss Thorwold had, for many years, been an excellent customer to Mrs. Stedworth, as well as a very amiable young lady, who had condescended to be extremely familiar with her, and to value her education and her talents as they deserved, without suffering her buying and selling position in society to interfere with their friendships.

All this was very fortunate at the present

moment. Nothing could be better than the manner of her reception; as far as it was in the power of Mrs. Stedworth to render it agreeable, it was so; for she had a great deal of that sort of quick perception which leads to the discovery of what is passing in the minds of the persons to whom she addressed herself, and also, of that judicious pliancy of manner which knows how to apply looks, words, and deeds, to suit it. There is but one word that can describe this peculiar species of talent, and that word is not *yet* quite English. *Tact* was the peculiar gift bestowed by the joint favours of nature and of art upon Mrs. Stedworth, and it was by means of this that she had been able, in more instances than one, to bring some of her proudest customers to treat her rather as a favoured friend and counsellor, than as a dealer in second-hand finery.

As it was evident, let the affair terminate as it would, that Miss Thorwold was at the present moment doing what was exceedingly wrong and imprudent, Mrs. Stedworth's manner had much more of obse-

quious respect than usual. It was exactly one of those occasions on which we sometimes see art mimicking nature, very cleverly, perhaps, but so as to make one feel the difference too, unless, as in the case of Miss Thorwold, particular feelings render the cheat too agreeable to be challenged.

If a kind, honest-hearted humble friend, on seeing an elegant young lady appear before, her suddenly deprived of all the appendages of her rank and station, had wished to soothe her feelings, it would probably have produced an increase of tender kindness, both in feeling and manner; but Mrs. Stedworth felt more for the bruised pride of her guest, than for any of her other sensations, and she assumed, accordingly, an air of such profound respect, that Amelia felt herself relieved at once from the only disagreeable emotion which her bold adventure had yet brought with it. More than once, as she approached the dwelling of her low-conditioned friend, her cheeks had tingled, and her heart had sunk, as she anticipated an

increase of familiarity which she felt would at the present moment be revolting to her.

But she did not do Mrs. Stedworth justice; she did not give her credit for the nicety of *tact* which taught her now, as it had often done before, that in order to be rendered as profitable as possible, a young lady of fashion must be handled gently, let her appear under whatever masquerading garb of humility she may. The profound courtesy with which she received her at the bottom of the stairs, as if she had been standing there in waiting for the honour of her approach, the extreme modesty with which she received the young lady's extended hand, looking as if she thought it too great a liberty to touch it, immediately suggested to Amelia the agreeable idea that "the dear good soul" was so occupied by thinking of her coming dignity as Lady William Hammond, and sister-in-law of the exquisitely elegant Duchess of Watertown, as to make her quite forget the easy terms they used to be upon.

She was kindly determined, however, to put her at her ease, if possible, because there really was too much to be done to afford the wasting any time in ceremony. But never, even under her present anxious circumstances, would Amelia have conversed with Mrs. Stedworth on the subject of her approaching marriage with so much freedom, had that judicious person *not* received her in the manner she did. Notwithstanding all the powerful motives, and demi-powerful motives, which were working in the brain of Miss Thorwold, like the foaming waters of converging cataracts, she would never have made any effort to relieve her mind by suffering the conflicting thoughts to escape her, had it not appeared so very evident that Mrs. Stedworth had sufficient good sense to perceive that the rank of Lord William more than compensated in every worldly view, not only for the loss of the young squire of the Mount, but also for the seeming imprudence of her present enterprise. This was exactly the right way in which to look at the whole affair, and showed so much expe-

rience and knowledge of the world, that Amelia felt the greatest confidence in her judgment in consequence of it, and joyfully determined to avail herself of her advice and assistance throughout the whole affair.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Lord William made his appearance in Half Moon-street just at the moment that his lovely Amelia was ready to receive him; but even while offering his enraptured thanks for the generous step she had taken, his anxiety for concealment caused him to ask her if she did not think she had run unnecessary risk by leaving Mrs. Knight so soon, observing that he could have arranged every thing without her coming, so as to have secured the performance of the marriage ceremony immediately upon her arrival. But she perfectly exonerated herself from every suspicion of imprudence by stating that the letter which had really arrived from her friend Miss Louisa Marchmont, the sister of the beautiful invalid, had most happily suggested such a motive for her leaving Crosby and England, as must not only excuse the suddenness

of her departure, but secure her from being followed by any troublesome inquiries. For not only was it true that the letter was written only the day before the departure of the Marchmont family for the continent, but that they left England so undecided as to the ultimate point of their destination as to make it impossible for some time to make any inquiries available. This, as of course it ought to do, perfectly satisfied Lord William, and the animation and eagerness with which she explained it all, made her look so magnificently beautiful, that her noble adorer declared, and perhaps truly, that not even at the famous ball at Almack's, where he had first beheld her, had she looked one thousandth part so divinely lovely as she did at that moment.

It was really a great relief to Miss Thorwold to find that her explanation on this point proved so completely satisfactory, for she had no inclination to mention to Lord William that she had herself a secondary motive for her abrupt departure, namely, her very earnest wish to avoid, if possible,

any further explanation with Alfred. Matters had advanced so far between them, that had they met again, a point blank proposal of marriage from the young gentleman must have been inevitable, which point-blank proposal would have required a point-blank answer, and this, at the time of her leaving Crosby, she had no inclination to give. For Miss Thorwold, blooming as she still was, had seen a good deal of the world, and was by no means ignorant of the instability in love affairs which is occasionally apparent in men of high fashion, as well as in meaner mortals; it, therefore, *had* occurred to her that she should be scarcely doing justice to herself did she definitively refuse an offer of marriage so eligible as that of Alfred Dermont, before she felt quite sure of becoming definitively the wife of some one she liked better.

It was this feeling quite as much as the convenient coincidence of Miss Marchmont's illness, which had induced her to arrange her little quarrel with Mrs. Knight, and to make her escape under cover of it.

It was, therefore, naturally a great comfort for her to find that a good deal less than half the truth sufficed to satisfy her lover as to the motives of her prompt arrival; and greater still, beyond all doubt, was the satisfaction with which she perceived that the other half was likely to prove altogether unnecessary. For, so far from there appearing to be any thing at all approaching to vacillation of purpose in Lord William, his love was evidently increased, rather than diminished by the near prospect of calling the universally-admired Amelia his own.

It was, to be sure, a singular sort of life she led between the impassioned raptures of her *haut ton* lover, and the obsequious devotion of her humble friend. The pretty drawing-room of Mrs. Stedworth was, of course, devoted wholly to Amelia's use, but, nevertheless, there were few hours during which Mrs. Stedworth did not occupy it with her, save those in which Lord William himself was her companion.

The same judicious tone and manner which had, in the first instance, sufficed to

remove the awkward sensations of Miss Thorwold, when presenting herself under such novel circumstances to her prudent hostess, continued to render their intercourse exceedingly soothing and agreeable to the young lady, and she, in return, so frankly indulged herself in unreserved communication with Mrs. Stedworth, as to render their long conversations almost equally agreeable to both.

It was impossible that this could continue through many hours of every day without its becoming evident to the acute capacity of the second-hand dress dealer, that although Amelia was as really in love with Lord William as it was possible she could be with any one, she nevertheless had not come to London without the comfortable assurance of having, according to Mrs. Stedworth's expressive phrase, "two strings to her bow." In short, Mrs. Stedworth very plainly perceived that, when the young lady first arrived, she was not without some lingering doubts of her noble lover's faith; but she saw also that these doubts were gradually wearing away,

and that she every day spoke with greater confidence of the happy and brilliant future which was opening before her as the wife of one of the most admired noblemen in England.

Mrs. Stedworth was exceedingly pleased that it should be so, and was by no means without personal hopes of her own, arising from the projected marriage, for she knew the Watertown family sufficiently well by reputation to think it possible, that by means of a good introduction she might hope for some profitable dealings with her grace.

But, notwithstanding this pleasant and promising view of the business, it occurred to Mrs. Stedworth, that it might be exceedingly well worth her while to keep rather an attentive eye on the proceedings of his lordship. For she really did know a good deal about men of fashion, as well as women of fashion, and as she was pretty certain that her dear Miss Thorwold had not five hundred pounds in the world, she could not help thinking that there might just be a possibility of some false dealing in the business, a conjecture which could

scarcely be considered as unreasonable, considering the very evident pains taken to keep the matter secret.

Amongst the other particulars which Amelia, without scruple, confided to her, the name of the parish church in which they were to be married, and in which the banns were being asked, was freely disclosed, accompanied, indeed, with an intimation that her personal attendance would be required at the wedding.

This intimation was answered in the most amiable manner possible, by an assurance that there was nothing she could do to assist so charming a young lady, which she was not ready to perform. But Mrs. Stedworth did not think it necessary to add that she was ready to do more than she was asked, and therefore Amelia, for the time being, was left ignorant of the fact, that her anxious hostess actually took the trouble of leaving the fashionable quarter of the town in which she and her best bonnet usually performed their devotions, in order to visit this vastly inelegant suburban church, for the purpose of ascertaining

whether the banns were really published there or not. The result of this friendly anxiety need not be entered into at present; nor is it necessary to follow any further the monotonous life led by Miss Thorwold during the ensuing fortnight. It is sufficient to state that Mrs. Stedworth very faithfully stood beside her while a gentleman clothed in a very dirty surplice performed the marriage ceremony. A person brought to the church by Lord William had the honour of giving the bride away; but he was unknown to her, and when she afterwards asked her noble bridegroom the name of his shy-looking friend, he only replied: "You don't know him, my love, but he is an excellent fellow, and greatly attached to me; his name is Morrison."

Neither can we follow the happy pair on their happy bridal tour to a very romantic and retired village in Gloucestershire, where it happened that the widowed mistress of the pretty rustic inn where they lodged, was also called Morrison. Though neither very elegant nor very costly, their entertain-

ment at this rustic inn was scrupulously neat, and by no means uncomfortable, and, as the weather was fine, the surrounding country very beautiful, and both bride and bridegroom exceedingly in love, the strange novelty of every thing around them only seemed to add to their felicity; and, excepting these novelties, there was little to distinguish their honeymoon from that of many others, save that it lasted only a fortnight. But Lady William had the satisfaction of knowing, as certainly as the assurance of Lord William could make her, that the curtailment of this favourite period of human life was not a matter of choice, but of necessity.

“My angel!” he exclaimed, as they sat together over their twelfth breakfast, counting from the day of their arrival at the little inn—“My angel!” he exclaimed, presenting her with a twelfth nosegay of moss-rose buds gathered from the garden of the said little inn, “how utterly impossible it will ever be for me to believe that it has ever fallen to the lot of any other man to be as supremely blessed as I have been during the fleeting

hours which have flown over our heads since I obtained the ecstatic privilege of calling you mine. But, alas ! my love, how lamentably swift do such moments vanish—the fairest, still the fleetest ! Could you believe, my Amelia, that we have already been married a fortnight ?”

“ The time has indeed flown swiftly, my dear lord,” replied her ladyship ; “ but the hours have been too precious for me not to count them. I know quite well, Lord William, that we have indeed been married a whole fortnight.”

“ I heartily wish that I could forget it, my sweet love,” said he, tenderly kissing the beautiful hand which presented his coffee. “ But it seems that you keep too accurately a note of time, to permit my indulging myself in any such dear delusion ; and therefore, Amelia, I am obliged to remember, and alas ! you must remember too, my love, that it is absolutely necessary we should return immediately to town, in order to ascertain whether Watertown has redeemed his promise by paying my terribly alarming debts ;

for till I have this assurance, I can only, as you already know but too well, creep about like an escaped felon by owl's light."

"But you have no doubt, my love, about his having kept his promise, have you?" said Lady William Hammond, while a slight shade of anxiety flitted across her ivory brow.

"It were a sin, dearest," replied his lordship, gaily, "to doubt the pledged word of a noble duke; but nevertheless it behoves me as a man of business, and, moreover, the bridegroom of the loveliest woman in existence, that I should ascertain the fact without delay. It would be rather an awkward thing, most beautiful Amelia, were there to be any mistake about it."

For a single moment there was on the countenance of his lordship a queer sort of melo-dramatic vehemence of gloomy expression, which, if it had lasted, might perhaps rather have alarmed his bride, though she was by no means a nervous person; but as it was immediately followed by a gay smile, and the careful preparation of a new-laid

egg for her use and service, she did not much mind it, and only asked him, as she eat the said egg, whether he did not think his grace of Watertown would be a good deal disappointed when he discovered that he had paid the money for nothing—that is to say, without his having obtained the wealthy sister-in-law he coveted.

“Upon my word, dear love, I have not given myself the trouble of considering whether he will or not. All I have considered is, that I am as much the lawful son of the late duke as he, and that if he suffers me to be marched to gaol, he will be disgraced for life. This is the only rational light in which to view the transaction between us. And as to his daring seriously to resent my choosing to have a will of my own, in choosing a wife, I will not suppose it possible.”

The breakfast was then finished, as all their former breakfasts had been, with a gay proposal of a ramble through the hay-fields by the side of the river; but pleasant as this was, the sun had not set before they had

left the white-washed inn of Mrs. Morrison far behind them, and were scudding away at a great pace, and perfectly incog., upon a railroad which was to bring them into London at a safely early hour on the following morning.

CHAPTER XI.

POOR Julia, meanwhile, was enjoying as much happiness as ever seemed likely to fall to her lot, from the perfect reconciliation which had taken place between herself and Alfred ; and this happiness was neither solitary nor selfish, for Alfred appeared to share in it with almost equal pleasure. Nay, as far as the comfort of finding himself again on good terms with Julia went, it was certainly quite as keenly felt by him as by her, the real difference between their feelings arising from his suffering as much pain from the absence of Amelia, as Julia felt relief from it.

But at this time the sentiments of Julia for

her early friend had undergone a change as meritorious, as it was salutary. It was not that she loved him a whit less than before the bright meteor had passed over them, the blaze of which had seemed to show her the state of her heart, at the same moment that it crushed it for ever. No; her affection was equally firm, equally devoted, equally self-forgetting and entire; but it was now no longer the fluttering, fitful hope and fear-tinted love of a young girl, who is gay one minute, and pensive the next, she knows not why. All such rainbow sort of folly was quite over for Julia. She knew all about it now, all about Alfred, all about herself, and (which was by far the worst part of it) all about Amelia too.

ALL about Amelia? No, not quite all; for she did not know any thing whatever about Lord William Hammond, she had never seen him, nor ever heard his noble name mentioned. Had it been otherwise, had his lordship not taken himself off before the archery meeting at Crosby, matters might have gone very differently; for Julia was

more jealously watchful for Alfred, than Alfred was for himself, and it would have hardly been possible for such a day to have passed, without showing something more of the beautiful Amelia to Julia, than all which had gone before it had enabled her to discover.

Up to a certain point, Julia could have forced herself, and had forced herself, to endure the seeing much that she disliked, without betraying her observations to Alfred. Had she not become conscious that she loved Alfred, even as he himself loved Amelia, she would not thus have acted. But she shrunk with absolute terror from the idea of first judging her hastily, only, perhaps, because she was beloved by Alfred, and then interfering to separate them, when, perhaps, despite their mutual faults, their mutual love might make them happy. For Julia knew that Alfred had faults, but she knew also how well he could be loved in spite of them, and how, therefore, could she venture to judge the faults of Amelia more severely? What right had she to suppose that Alfred's

love was not of the same forgiving nature as her own?

So, up to a certain point Julia would have kept all her observations to herself, and Alfred would have derived no benefit from the keener perceptions of his friend. But beyond that point most surely she would not have gone. Neither the pride of maiden delicacy, nor the conscientious integrity of her self-doubting spirit, would have led her to look on in silence had she seen reason to believe that Miss Thorwold, while intending to become the wife of Alfred, secretly preferred another man.

But no such wildly improbable idea had ever crossed her innocent head, and the only office that her strictly guarded love was now permitted to perform, consisted in listening for long hours to the rhapsodies of Alfred's love for another. And this she did with such gentle martyr-like endurance, that there were moments in which she almost forgave herself for the sin of having loved too well, from an honest consciousness that the penance she endured was sufficient to atone for it.

In this manner, days and weeks passed on, greatly, of course, to the annoyance of the enamoured young man, but without suggesting either to himself or his parents any shadow of doubt concerning the ultimate success of his passion. Lord Ripley really owed a considerable debt of gratitude to the friendly exertions of Mrs. Knight, for it was for his sake alone that she continued to make the prolonged absence of Amelia appear to the Dermont family only as an additional reason for loving her. Her exemplary kindness in attending the sick-bed of her young friend, was again and again pointed out, and applauded to the echo, while of her continued silence towards herself she said not a word.

No suspicion whatever of the truth had indeed ever suggested itself to Mrs. Knight. She fancied that she knew Amelia thoroughly, and felt persuaded that had Lord William uttered a single word approaching to serious love-making, her triumphant joy at it would have been far too great to conceal. She therefore doubted not that the troublesome

beauty still intended to bestow herself upon Alfred Dermont, and concluded that, having been really invited by the afflicted family of Caroline Marchmont to accompany them abroad, she had accepted the proposal, notwithstanding the melancholy circumstances attending it, in order to escape the mortification of again owning herself disappointed in her hopes respecting Lord William.

As to her silence towards herself, there was nothing very surprising in that. She had quarrelled with her in a fit of ill-humour, doubtless occasioned by her disappointment at Lord William's sudden departure, nor did she expect to hear from her again, till such time as she should be ready to return to her accustomed apartment at Crosby.

Meanwhile, the little affairs of the neighbourhood did not stand still, but, on the contrary, an event of great importance had occurred at Overby, which occasioned as vehement emotions in the hearts of the young ladies of that town, as the departure of Miss Thorwold in that of Alfred. The military

had been ordered off ! And though, from the still unsettled state of the country, another detachment was expected to arrive, the lamentations were very general ; nay, even the arrival of this new detachment was an event which, for a long time, remained problematical, and during this interval the state of the little town was indeed melancholy. Of all the young ladies who had taken a lively interest in the departed squadron, Miss Celestina Marsh was the only one who listened, for the last time, to their drums and fifes, as they were borne to her by the breeze across one or two enclosures which divided the high road from Beech Grove (for at Beech Grove she was staying at the time), Miss Celestina Marsh was the only one of them all who listened to those sad parting notes with composure.

But she felt, with the wounded pride of an unfortunate and too susceptible young lady, that she had nothing to regret. The conduct of Captain Waters had been, if possible, more atrociously, more basely false, than even that of Ensign Wheeler ; and

nothing but the sympathising friendship of Mrs. Stephens could have enabled her to bear it as she had done.

To her brother, also, the departure of these two unworthy gentlemen was a great relief, for excepting during the happy, and now pretty frequent, intervals during which Celestina was from home, his life had been made unspeakably wretched by the alternate hot and cold fits of his sister's fever, which at one time led her to implore him, sometimes upon her bended knees, and at others in the accents of a commanding termagant, to invite either the one or the other of them to the house, and at another to threaten him with the mingled scorn and abhorrence of the whole neighbourhood, if he did not rouse his courage sufficiently to insist upon their explaining the cause of their most unprincipled conduct.

It is not possible, in the short space which is all that can be allowed to this portion of Miss Celestina's history, to do any thing like justice to the unequalled gentleness of her high-minded but pitying brother. Per-

haps the idea of her suffering from hopeless love would not have touched his heart so deeply, had he not known so well how great was the misery it brought. Neither could the alteration of Waters for Wheeler, and Wheeler for Waters, enlighten him, as it would have done most others upon the nature of the sentiment so hopelessly suffered by his unfortunate sister ; for never conceiving it possible that she would have been just as well pleased to have one at her feet as the other, he imagined that the one he had just heard her talk about was the ungrateful and too fondly loved master of her destiny, and that her subsequent wish to obtain the society of the other either arose from the desperate hope that his conversation might indeed assist her to forget the traitor who had robbed her of her peace, or from another hope, probably more desperate still, that a feeling of jealousy, on hearing that another was paying her attention, might bring back the fickle ensign to his allegiance.

The secret conviction of his own heart,

that neither the one nor the other ever had the very least propensity to fall in love with his unfortunate sister, did not at all lessen his pity, but, on the contrary, rather increased it; for was it not an additional proof of the melancholy fact that no man was likely to love her? In truth, it was his early conviction of this melancholy fact, which had first created in his heart that profound emotion of compassion which had led to the indulgent kindness she so unworthily abused. All this may appear very far-fetched and ridiculous to those who have never witnessed the operation of a sentiment so true in its effect, yet so absurdly false as to its cause. But such things are.

Great indeed was the satisfaction of George, on hearing that this dangerous body of men were on their march, and his satisfaction was still further increased by the unexpected courage with which his sister bore it. He would have felt less assured of his promised peace for the future, perhaps, had he been aware that this courageous resignation to necessity arose from a

speech of Mrs. Stephens's uttering. "I wish you joy, my beloved Celestina," said she, on hearing of the movement which was to take away the false-hearted wretches, whose unprincipled conduct had been so often dwelt upon by her friend; "I wish you joy with all my heart! Thank Heaven! we are sure of having more military, for it was but yesterday I heard of a dozen more frames being broke; and if we do get another set, my dear girl, it will be hard indeed if it does not turn out better for you."

At Overby itself, the scenes which followed the announcement of this terrible news were truly melancholy. Not but what Cupid's bolt had really fallen with sure aim and quite sufficient force in one direction, for, like as when a flight of wild fowl journeying on the wing, and feeling themselves above the reach of ordinary shots, dream not of danger, one among them gets a chance hit, and falls at the feet of the fowler, so fell young Ensign Wheeler by the shaft shot from the gentle eyes of Miss Louisa

Morris; but, excepting in this solitary instance, the troops sent to this pretty little town, under the command of Major Sommerton, left it again very tolerably heart whole. But not the less for that did many a pretty young lady “peak and pine” at their departure ; nor was there one among them who did not in her heart believe that if they had been suffered to remain there only a very little longer, the work, in very many instances so auspiciously begun, would have been happily completed.

The first gleam of hope which followed all this woe was brought by Miss Kersley, who, thanks to the general information professionally obtained by her uncle, the apothecary, entered the Miss Murrays’ sleeping apartment, where the two pretty sisters were lovingly weeping together, seated side by side upon the bed, with the stirring intelligence that two more troops had been ordered down, and were expected to march into the town immediately. The lively Miss Kattie Murray received the news in the same happy

spirit in which it was given, and, dashing the tears from her eyes, exclaimed, "Heaven be praised for that, Mary!"

But her more pensive sister, though it may be that the gushing tear-drops ceased to flow, by no means recovered her spirits so quickly, for after several moments of very earnestly grave meditation, she replied, "Ah, Mary! and if your news be true it may not be doubted but we might have had worse. But oh! my dear! we have got it all to begin over again!"

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This military movement was the most important public event which befel the town of Overby and its neighbourhood during the first six weeks after the departure of Miss Thorwold from Crosby, and although it arrived amidst gloom and sadness, the darkness that at first seemed to result from it speedily dispersed, and a considerable degree of unexpected brilliance was the consequence. The principal cause of this probably was that the regiment of which this new detachment made a part, being a favourite one with the

aristocracy of England, no less than three noble scions of right noble houses were among the officers now sent to keep the working men of the district in order, and to scatter confusion among the hearts of its idle ladies.

As to the effect which they produced upon the town beauties I can say but little, my historical researches having for the time been directed elsewhere. Perhaps they created more of vanity and less of love, and where they condescended to smile, it may be that less of future hope, and more of present triumph was felt than before. The sensation they occasioned, however, was altogether exceedingly great. Little Louisa Morris indeed would not have given a penny a dozen for them, had they been put up to sale. But her case was, as we know, exceptional.

It was among the class of persons designated as "*the county families*" (a class now alas! but thinly scattered) that these gentlemen produced the most effect; a series of dinner parties immediately began, which, as the three honourables were sociable and

pleasant in their bearing, soon led to better acquaintance.

Mrs. Knight in particular declared that it quite did her good to get hold of somebody who knew something about the rest of the world. Mrs. Verepoint had the gratification of finding in one of these honourable men the son of her most intimate friend, and Colonel Dermont was startled by being informed with all befitting forms and ceremonies, within two months after their arrival, that the Honourable Mr. Borrowdale, by far the most distinguished individual of the trio, had no wish so near his heart as that of being permitted to lay himself, and his very handsome younger brother's fortune, at the feet of his little ward Julia.

This was a proposal so every way advantageous, that, of course, the worthy colonel could not fail of being extremely pleased by it; but, nevertheless, it is certain that his first and most powerful sensation, on receiving Mr. Borrowdale's letter, was surprise. Julia had hitherto been considered so completely as a child by them all, that the notion

of her being *married* was really laughable ; but, of course, he knew better than to treat such an offer lightly, and when he communicated the matter to his wife, it was done with a great deal of guardian-like dignity.

This did not, however, prevent Mrs. Dermont from exclaiming, " What can you mean by talking such nonsense, colonel? What joke have you got in your head now?" Nor could his very gravest remonstrance upon the impropriety of her treating the subject in so unsuitable a manner, prevent her from declaring, that though, of course, she was very glad of it, she could not help thinking it the most ridiculous thing she had ever heard in her life.

That the reader may not entirely agree with her in this, it may be as well to inform him that, whatever the Colonel and Mrs. Dermont might think of Julia, and her childishness, nobody now seeing her for the first time would have been likely to think there was any thing childish in her at all.

In the first place, she had been growing very rapidly during the last year and a half,

and although till very lately this additional height had not increased either her beauty or her air of womanhood, it was now doing both. A few days of sickly paleness, and a few days of heavy-looking eyes, had been the consequence of the twofold and doubly sad discovery of Alfred's love for Miss Thorwold, and her own love for him. But at seventeen minus a month or two, it is only upon weak or wilful spirits that such sorrows press with a weight sufficiently heavy to counteract the buoyant tendency of nature, and actually to crush and wither what has so strong a principle of hopeful life in it. And, of all others, the nature of Julia was the last to sink and perish under selfish sorrow. The struggle in her young heart, produced as it was by a multitude of pure and virtuous feelings, was morally healthy, though intensely painful, and it brought with wonderful rapidity a new-born expression to her features, which others, besides the heart-struck Mr. Borrowdale, might have found very lovely. In truth, had Julia Drummond lived to the age of a hundred without hav-

ing had her heart awakened, and her intellect and principles brought into action, she might have remained during the whole period more like a child, that is to say, less fully developed, than she was now. Her natural complexion was still pale, and of a species of carnation which, during childhood, generally falls under the disparaging epithet of sallow. And this is a defect which renders the ugliness of many a little creature hopeless, excepting to the prophetic eye of experience. So, on the other hand, there is no possible beauty of childish features which can produce an effect so strikingly beautiful as that given by a fine complexion. Put on a female child, with pink and white colouring on its soft round cheeks, and showing the bright light hair that belongs to it, a lace cap with pretty pale-coloured ribbons, and the beauty of the little miniature woman has something perfectly angelic in it.

Had any such experiment been made on Julia, the exclamation produced would most probably have been, "How frightful!" But now her turn was come; and few, indeed,

are the vermillion-tintured cheeks which might venture to compare in beauty with the pale loveliness of those of Julia.

It is exactly such a face as hers which profits most by being made the index of every thought that arises in the heart. There are many faces by no means deficient in expression, which, though they may gain in interest by the sort of gossiping record they bear of what is passing within, lose in beauty from the want of repose, which ought, in every fair face, to be alternate with mobility of feeling, in order that the charm of both states may be fully felt.

But in Julia this very repose was elegant, and never, excepting during moments when every human eye is shunned, did emotion destroy the exquisite harmony of her features, although all who looked in her face must be dull indeed, if they could not see both thought and feeling there.

Yet, such as I describe her, such as she was, Alfred Dermont was scarcely more aware that she was beautiful, than were his unobservant father and mother. Once only,

during the early part of the fête at the Mount, had his observation been sufficiently roused to notice her appearance ; but though he did notice it, and really felt both surprised and pleased that the dear little girl showed symptoms of being likely some day to add beauty to all the good and endearing qualities she already possessed, though he did notice this for a moment, he soon forgot it again completely, amidst the vehement emotions produced by his passionate admiration for Amelia.

The finished womanhood of Miss Thorwold completely threw into the shade the girlish, unobtrusive graces of Julia ; and her considerable juniorship to himself also, which at his age appears so greatly more important than it does afterwards, completed the *sort* of delusion which prevented his having ever seen her as she really was.

On hearing, therefore, which he immediately did from his father, of Mr. Borrowdale's proposal, his surprise was fully as great as that of his parents ; but his satisfaction from it decidedly less. The heart of man is

a queerly complicated machine, and to follow it through all its various movements is well nigh impossible. Alfred really was an extremely fine young man, both in body and soul; but we know that he had been badly educated, and that the devotion and obedience shown to his whims and his will had greatly disposed him to believe that the whole world and all the things in it were made for him.

If this will not suffice to account for the extremely disagreeable sensations with which he heard of Mr. Borrowdale's proposal, it must rest in mystery and darkness, for I have no clearer explanation to offer. Certain it is, however, that his sensations *were* disagreeable, and the contraction of his brow thereupon so evident, that the colonel, though a good deal pre-occupied, observed it.

"Why, Alfred, don't you think it is a capital good match for her?" said the old gentleman, looking at his son with an air of puzzled surprise.

"Upon my word, sir, I know nothing at all about it," he replied "The young man

is so completely a stranger to us all, that it seems to me quite impossible we should be any of us capable of forming an opinion of him. And Julia herself, whom of course it most nearly concerns, is still so completely a child as to render the asking her to form any serious judgment on the subject an absolute farce."

"Why, to be sure, Julia is rather young, Alfred. Perhaps she is too young to make it right for her to marry yet? But it is a capital good connexion, you know, and I don't feel as if I should be doing right to refuse it just because Julia happens to be very young-looking; for there is many a girl that marries at seventeen, you know, and I won't let her marry till after her birth-day, because she will be then of age, which will make all the settlement work so much more straightforward and simple. And I don't think the dear child will be in any such hurry herself, as to make her wish to bring it to a conclusion before."

"Then Julia has accepted him, sir?" said Alfred.

"Why, I look upon it as a matter of course that she will accept him," returned the colonel, smiling. "Borrowdale is by far the handsomest young man, I take it, that she has ever seen, except yourself, Alfred, and you count for nothing, you know, as the poor child, even if she were years older, could never have looked upon you in any other light than as a brother. I can't say," he continued, "that I think there is much danger of her refusing him. However, I have had no opportunity of asking her yet, for she was out walking when the note came, and she has not been in since."

"I dare say you are quite right, sir," said Alfred, in a tone that seemed to indicate a good deal of scorn for the whole race of young ladies (though, questionless, he made a mental reservation in favour of one), "and I should like to be present when you tell her of it."

"Then I will do it at once, for here she comes;" and the old gentleman opened the parlour door as he spoke, and placed himself

on the steps of the hall door to way-lay her as she entered.

“Come with me, my dear, for a moment, will you?” said he, holding out his hand to her—“I have something to say to you.”

It instantly occurred to Julia that tidings had arrived concerning the return of Miss Thorwold, and that she was now summoned for the purpose of being told when the nuptials of Alfred were to take place. She felt her heart beat rather more strongly than it ought to do; but a month ago it would have beat more strongly still, and, more pleased by her own composure than frightened at its not being greater, she obeyed without hesitation, and almost without reluctance. But she did not expect to see Alfred, and her colour went and came, and went again, as she anticipated hearing the expected intelligence in his presence.

Alfred watched these symptoms of emotion. “She guesses what is coming,” thought he, “so we shall not have the amusement of witnessing any surprise. It is lucky for Miss Julia that my Amelia was out of the way

when this marrying gentleman came among us. Had he seen her first, he would scarcely"—but the unfinished sentence hung suspended, as it were, in his mind, as he looked at her, and instead of finishing it he began another, which if uttered would have expressed an idea which certainly never entered his head before, namely that it might be possible, seeing there was such great variety of tastes in the world, that some men might think the face of Julia, just as she looked at that moment, as beautiful as that of Miss Thorwold herself.

"Julia," said the colonel, "I have news for you, that I think will surprise you a little, but which I hope will please you more. And I am quite sure it will, if you are the sensible young lady I take you for. Do you think you shall be able to bear a surprise, my dear, as a grown-up young woman ought to do? My news will put you, and all of us, into a bustle, I promise you."

"Well, sir! What is it?" said Julia, quietly, and once again, with *true* feminine

artifice, endeavouring to make her outward seeming as far unlike her real condition as possible.

“Why this it is, my dear child,” replied her guardian, looking at her very affectionately. “I have to inform you that the Honourable Mr. Borrowdale aspires to the happiness of possessing your fair little hand in marriage, and that he proposes settlements which might satisfy the most covetous old guardian in the world.”

“Is that all?” said Julia, greatly relieved; and thoughtless of the strange appearance which so much levity must have at such a serious moment, she mounted upon a footstool, which stood before the open sash-window, evidently in order to pass from thence to the window-sill, as was her frequent custom, when wishing for an impromptu run upon the lawn.

“No, Julia, it is not quite all,” resumed the colonel, gravely, and evidently displeased at the careless, not to say saucy tone of the young lady’s reply. “It is not all; for it is proper that I should tell you, though,

from delicacy, Mr. Borrowdale does not, that his elder brother, who had that dreadful fall from his horse in the park a year or two ago, is not expected to live. He has been in a very melancholy state ever since the accident, and now he is said to have fallen into a rapid decline. So you perceive that the wife of Mr. Borrowdale is pretty well certain of being one day or other Lady Middlehurst."

"The gentleman's declining state, sir, will not make any difference to me, I do assure you ; for I certainly shall never marry Mr. Borrowdale," replied Julia.

"And pray, why so, Miss Drummond?" demanded the colonel, in a very stern voice.

"Because I would rather not, sir," said Julia, in a manner pretty nearly as stern as his own; but then, repentant as it seemed, for this unusual harshness, she stepped back from the tempting open window into the room, and putting her hand on the old gentleman's shoulder, kissed his forehead.

"Do not let us talk any more about Mr. Borrowdale, my dear sir," said she, "for it

can be of no use, you know, as I do not at all want to be married to any body. I like living at the Mount better than any where else a thousand times over, and if you and dear Mrs. Dermont will only let me go on so, I shall never wish to go away. And I know you will be so kind as to write just exactly such a letter as ought to be written to Mr. Borrowdale. Will you, sir?"

This was said very coaxingly, but nevertheless, and notwithstanding the kiss which preceded it, the colonel did not recover his good-humour at all, but drawing away from the little hand which still rested on his shoulder, he replied, "The only sort of letter which, in my opinion, ought to be written to Mr. Borrowdale, is one which should inform him that his very flattering proposal is accepted. We all know that it is perfectly impossible so very young a lady as you are, Miss Julia, can have fallen in love with any body else; and therefore it is my duty as your guardian, to tell you, that so excellent an offer must not be rejected till you have given yourself time to think a little more at

leisure upon the subject. If I were this very moment to sit down and write such an answer as you have told me to do, I have little doubt that you would reproach me for it in your heart before this time to-morrow. Don't you think so, Alfred?"

"No, indeed, sir, I do not," replied the young man, eagerly; "and I must say that I shall think you very wrong, sir, if you refuse to write in the manner Miss Drummond desires. If she is old enough to accept an offer of marriage, she must also be old enough to refuse one; and I really cannot conceive that you can, in any way, be justified in refusing, or even in delaying, to forward Julia's answer to Mr. Borrowdale."

Tears, which Alfred felt very sure were tears of gratitude, started to poor Julia's eyes on hearing him thus take her part, and she gave him one look of thankfulness as she passed again towards the open window, which had more of truthfulness in it than any look she had bestowed upon him for the last three months or more.

"If that is really your opinion, Alfred,"

said the father, as soon as Julia had fairly made her escape through the window, "I certainly shall give up my own. But it does seem almost a pity, Alfred, to refuse such a very excellent offer. You certainly can't expect that she will ever get a better. With all my care, and I am sure I have not spared it, her fortune will be but a trifle beyond ten thousand pounds ; and that, even in these poor days, will not suffice to purchase a coronet. Neither must we, I suppose, reckon too much on her beauty, Alfred ; for I don't believe that any body ever did think her pretty before. I can't say that I think her plain, myself ; rather the contrary indeed, and especially of late, since she has shot up so. But that is no rule for others, and as I never did hear any body call her handsome, it is plain that she cannot be considered as a beauty ; and all this ought to be taken into consideration, you know, or I shall not be doing my duty as a guardian."

"I do not think, sir," returned Alfred, rather thoughtfully, "that Julia is ugly enough to be urged, on that account, to

marry any body she does not like." And it is certain that, at that moment, Alfred was thinking of the look she had given him as she passed towards the window.

"I don't mean to say she is ugly," returned the colonel, rather pettishly; "and you know well enough, Alfred, that I never do refuse to listen to your opinion,—but still, I do think it is a very great pity."

The refusal, however, was written, and there was an end of the affair; the young honourable immediately making use of his interest for obtaining leave of absence for a few months, with the well-founded hope that the quarters of the detachment would be changed before they were expired.

The hearts of young ladies and gentlemen are very often extremely difficult to be interpreted, and in the present instance, it would be any thing but easy to explain, satisfactorily, why it was that the little scene above related occasioned feelings so decidedly agreeable both to Alfred and Julia. Why did Julia feel glad that Alfred should know that Mr. Borrowdale had made her

an offer ? And why was Alfred put into a state of such amiable good-humour, because she had refused it ?

There was no mystery, however, in Julia's feeling very grateful to Alfred for his timely interference, as it certainly saved her a good deal of trouble ; for had Mrs. Dermont been consulted before the answer was despatched, she would not have been let off so easily. But she sighed the next day, poor girl, when she thought how speedily he was rewarded for his good-nature ; for not only did he hear news of his beautiful Amelia, but it reached him in what he must have felt to be the most flattering manner in the world.

CHAPTER XII.

THE railroad journey upon which Lord and Lady William Hammond had just set out when last we parted from them, brought them safely to the London station, and from thence a hackney-coach conveyed them with equal safety to the friendly Mrs. Stedworth's, in Half-Moon-street. The tender assiduities of Lord William in no degree relaxed; and if his beautiful bride received them with a little less of genuine rapture than at first, some allowance must be made for her on account of the disagreeable sensations naturally attending her return to town as Miss Thorwold, still hiding herself in a little lodging in Half-Moon-street, instead of coming to an osten-

sible home as the Lady William Hammond, sister-in-law to the Duke of Watertown.

There had certainly been, on both sides, a good deal of that species of haste, which in matrimonial affairs is considered as likely to lead to leisurely repentance; but, as yet, the gentleman appeared to feel it less than the lady. He still thought his Amelia one of the loveliest women he had ever seen, and as this was precisely the reason why he had suddenly come to the resolution that he would not let Alfred Dermont marry her, he had no excuse, as long as this opinion lasted, for being very greatly disappointed at the result of the party of pleasure upon which his impetuosity had led him to embark.

But Amelia, though she certainly did admire Lord William Hammond very much indeed, and was, after her fashion, very violently in love with him, admired LORD William Hammond so very much more, that the seemingly total eclipse of this portion of the individual upon whom she had bestowed herself, must naturally be supposed

to damp her rapturous feelings considerably.

Unfortunately, the beautiful Amelia was subject to what her obsequious friend, Mrs. Stedworth, called "low spirits," whenever things went contrary to her inclinations; but ruder lips might have given the state of her mind she thus described a different name, and have declared her to have a most tremendously sullen temper, which made itself both felt and seen, as soon as the fit fell upon her.

From the time of her return from the widow Morrison's cottage, to the end of the second week subsequently spent in Half-Moon-street, Amelia had, in truth, little or no reason to complain that his lordship had deceived her ; for if his condition were, in fact, worse than he had described it to her, she had not yet found it out, and it was therefore, not of *that* she could complain. Nevertheless, she did not at all scruple to let him see that she thought he was behaving extremely ill, in not letting her understand that he was approaching to the end of the

hateful incognito under which she was living.

Some ladies take one way of complaining and some another ; none of them, perhaps, render them very agreeable, but the tender and the plaintive,—particularly if the complaining lady happen to be very handsome, and has the good luck of being greatly admired by the gentleman complained to,—will be endured much longer than the sullen.

Had the beautiful Amelia been aware of this, she might certainly have managed better, but as it was, she not only ran the usual risk that complaining always brings with it, but made the fatal mistake of doing it in the most unbecoming manner possible.

It would not be saying at all too much, were I to declare that she looked positively plain when Lord William returned to Half-Moon-street to dinner on the thirty-second day after that on which he had saluted her beautiful lips as his bride. Her hair, to which she had been used to pay the very greatest attention, was on this unfortunate occasion, completely neglected ; and as it was

not her custom to wear it in the convenient fashion of bands, but in long ringlets of surpassing beauty, though not of natural curl, the absence of all care produced a very deplorable effect indeed. Perhaps the daring neglect of her rouge was more fatal still; for all lustre seemed to have faded from her eyes, and a heavy look of sullen discontent but ill supplied its place.

Had Amelia felt herself in the terrible position of those who have trusted their all to the faith and honour of a lover, she would have doubtless been more cautious; but as the continuing to keep her marriage secret was, in fact, the only thing she greatly feared, she determined to make his lordship feel that it was not her intention to let it remain so long, and that the character of the fond and lovely wife was not the only one she had the power to perform.

“He cannot unmarry me,” thought she, “let him think me as little like an angel as he will. And he may find out that it will be better policy to present a beautiful adoring young bride to the admiring world, than

such a one as I may have the power of showing him."

The first words uttered by his lordship upon entering the drawing-room and looking upon his greatly altered lady were, "THE DEVIL!"

There was so much of genuine astonishment in his look and manner, that Amelia determined to take advantage of it, and said, with brows knit, and every feature sunk, if I may use the phrase, in such a slough of ill-humour, as to make her look any thing in the world but lovely or loveable, "Your coming here to swear at me, my lord, will not go far towards persuading me that I am doing my duty towards myself and my noble relatives by remaining here, to all intents and purposes, in the honourable character of your lordship's mistress. Believe me *at once*, when I tell you that I have had enough of it. Has your brother paid your debts, my lord? You gave me to understand that it was in your power to make him do this, as soon as you returned to town. If this be done, I am willing to go abroad

with you, but it must be as your wife, sir, and not as your mistress. Nor do I doubt that my uncle will assist us in living decently abroad, till you obtain possession of your mother's fortune. Are your debts paid, Lord William?"

Lord William never took his eyes off her for a single instant while she was speaking, and when she ceased, he only replied by saying in a voice that betokened more coldness than passion of any kind, "What on earth have you been doing to yourself, Amelia? You look as ugly as Hecate, and forty years old at the very least. What does it all mean? Are you getting up a comedy for my amusement?"

"Far from it, my lord," she replied, "we certainly have been amusing ourselves with a comedy, but it is over. It might all do very well for a week or two, and might go on longer still had you married a pretty rustic. But you must be aware that for a woman of fashion I have had enough of it; and I must confess that I could not have expected your lordship to enact the senti-

mental so long. Has your brother paid your debts, my lord?"

"No, my lady, he has not," replied Lord William.

"Is he about to do it?" she rejoined.

Amelia had been acquainted with Lord William Hammond for considerably more than a year, which period included two long London seasons. For great part of that time they had met almost constantly every day, and sometimes oftener. For just when Miss Thorwold rode, Lord William was in the habit of riding also, not to mention a variety of other accidents which brought them occasionally together, so that the acquaintance ripened by degrees into considerable intimacy; and as it happened that they mutually admired each other with more than common admiration, it naturally followed that these perpetual meetings, and this constantly increasing intimacy led to a great deal of conversation between them.

Nevertheless it is a certain fact that Miss Thorwold knew no more of the real character of Lord William Hammond, at the time that

the marriage service was performed between them, than if she had never seen him. Neither did his lordship know very much of her; but the case was widely different between them. For, respecting her, he might, had he set himself seriously to the task, have easily known all that there was to know. The little fact of her being deeply in debt lay not, indeed, exactly on the surface, but even that might have been guessed at, from the very visible extravagance of her toilet, and her well-known dependence upon an uncle, by no means famous for his generosity. But as for all the rest, what was there to be known that he did not know? Whether she might be more sulky or more savage when out of temper, could only, of course, be learned by experience, and to say the truth, he cared very little about it. As long as she continued to charm him, he should remain near her; and when she ceased to do so, he should not. Such, whether to wife or mistress, would naturally be the result with every rational man, and he had no intention of regulating his own conduct upon any other prin-

ciple, so that, in truth, it was by no means worth his while to trouble himself respecting the peculiarities of her character. Comparatively speaking there was but little to be known, and concerning that little he cared not one single farthing.

But Amelia, in forming her estimate of him, had left out just every thing of sufficient importance to be deemed character at all. His rank placed him in the highest circles, his stature and good carriage made him conspicuous there; his waltzing was perfect, his dress irreproachable, and his admiration of, and devotion to, beauty so notorious, as to render his notice a certificate sufficient to obtain for any woman in Europe a place in all the books of beauty that were published.

What could such a woman as Miss Thorwold wish for more? To obtain him she would have sacrificed all the friends, as well as all the lovers in the world, and at the moment when, more than half despairing, she at length won the precious prize, she was too giddy with the speed and the exertion she had used, during the last part of the race, to be

quite capable of examining carefully the ground immediately around the goal.

But the time was now coming for her to know a great deal more about him than she had ever done before. She had great confidence in herself, poor young lady, and a strong persuasion that when she chose to exert herself, nobody could effectually make head against her, and now she had quite made up her mind that she would exert herself. Once for all it was necessary to make her husband understand that she was a very resolute and determined person; for so only could this nonsense about keeping their marriage secret be put an end to. She had already lived above a month in possession of the name and title she most coveted, without having heard either pronounced, excepting by Mrs. Stedworth, and let what would be the consequence she was determined that this should continue no longer.

“Is he about to do it?” she repeated, in a tone that she did not intend to render gentle. “Speak, sir; I shall endure this child’s play, this utter foolery, no longer.”

Lord William's face at that moment was not one in which might be read strange matters, for it would have been pretty nearly impossible for the most acute to have read any thing in it at all. It was impossible. There were the features too large and too elongated to be handsome, yet too regular and too well kept in drawing-room shape, to be absolutely ugly ; there they were, eyes, mouth, and all, exactly before the eyes of Amelia, and evidently rather seeking her gaze than avoiding it, but without betraying the very slightest particle of expression which might lead her to judge how he relished her attack.

“Do you think the dinner is nearly ready?” said he, in a voice as void of all expression as his features. “At any rate, I presume I shall have time to wash my hands ;” and so saying, he walked very quietly out of the drawing-room into the bedroom, and, without shutting the door, commenced the operation.

Amelia was a little puzzled, but not in the least degree frightened. She was married. That of itself had removed one ever-present

source of dread and doubt ; and she was married to the son of a duke. This, too, had removed the dread and doubt concerning the chances of her obtaining a title, or not obtaining it ; so that, instead of being frightened, she felt more full of courage than she had ever done in her life.

But she was puzzled, and condescended to employ the time occupied by her noble bridegroom in brushing his nails, and carefully setting them to rights with a towel, in meditating upon what it would be most spirited, and most conclusive, to say next.

His lordship re-entered the room with the same immoveable composure of countenance with which he had left it. The dinner followed immediately, and, while it lasted, the presence of Mrs. Stedworth's maid, who had the honour, for the present, of filling the joint posts of butler and footman, prevented the conversation from becoming interesting. Her ladyship, however, was not silent, finding fault, in a manner which she had never done before, with the dishes, the plates, the knives,

the forks, the spoons, the glasses, the tablecloth, and the napkins.

Nor was the silence of his lordship carried to an extent that was at all remarkable, for he said "yes" repeatedly, though not always quite *à propos*.

At length, however, they were again tête-à-tête, and Amelia immediately profited by the circumstance, expressing, with the most perfect freedom, her extreme weariness of the life she was leading, and her determination of putting an end to it directly, by either writing to, or seeing, the Duke of Watertown, and informing him, as well as all her other friends and acquaintance, of her marriage.

Lord William had his eyes fixed upon her during the whole time that she was saying this, but it was rather with the eye of a connoisseur critically examining a picture, than of a man listening to a spirited remonstrance from his wife.

This put her a good deal out of patience, for she knew that she was not well prepared

for such an examination ; and, although she had neglected her appearance, on purpose to show him that he was not to go on for ever expecting that she should spend her life in trying to please him, and no one else, she did not greatly relish this very deliberate examination of herself and her toilet.

“ Upon my honour, my lord, I think you would show infinitely more common sense if you would converse with me upon the subject which you must perceive occupies my thoughts, instead of staring at my pale face and undressed hair. Have no fears, my lord, that the wife you have chosen will disgrace you in the circle wherein we have both been accustomed to move, by any deficiency in beauty, in grace, in elegance, or neatness. Nature has done a good deal for me, Lord William, and I have no scruple in promising to do the rest when I again find myself in a situation to make it worth my while, and depend upon it, my good sir, that if I do not speedily recover that situation, the failure shall arise from no fault of mine. Tell me, Lord William, without further foolery or

delay, when is it your intention to take me from this detestable lodging, and to place me either in this country or any other that you may prefer, in a position more befitting your wife? Answer me this question, my lord, and I shall then know what it is my duty to do."

There was one solitary bottle of claret wine upon the table; Lord William took it up, and with a very gentlemanlike air said: "May I offer you some wine, Amelia?"

She did not refuse it, but on the contrary, slightly advanced her glass towards him. He filled it, and then he also filled his own, and having bowed to her in token that he drank her health, he swallowed the wine, quietly rose from his chair, looked at her for half an instant as he turned the lock of the door, and left the room.

Amelia had never in the whole course of her life felt so vehemently angry as she did at that moment. The quiet affectation of civility with which he had treated her, so very plainly showing that he feared her not, was infinitely more trying to her temper than any violence could have been.

“ And he dares to fancy I may be mastered thus !” she muttered through her closed teeth. “ Oh ! thoroughly shall he find himself mistaken !” A minute or two was thus wasted in very idle rage, and then she started up to follow him.

“ He shall not leave the house till I have fully explained my purpose,” thought she ; “ he shall not have to say that I have taken him by surprise,” and she opened the drawing-room door and began hastily to descend the stairs, expecting to reach the bottom before he had closed the door of the house behind him.

But though she had stepped rapidly she was too late to catch sight of him. On reaching the passage she found it quite unoccupied ; yet she was unconscious of having heard the house door shut, a sound which generally made itself heard over the greater part of the house.

“ Wretch !” she murmured, “ he made me too angry to hear any thing, but this night shall be the last of my degradation and imprisonment.”

She paused awhile before she re-ascended the stairs to decide whether she should or should not confide to her friend, Mrs. Stedworth, the real state of the case, and ask her opinion as to the best, the shortest, and the safest way of communicating her marriage to the duke, which for many reasons she thought it would be wise to do, before she announced it to her uncle, and having thought about it for a moment, she descended the few stairs she had already mounted, and approached the door of the parlour in which, at this hour, Mrs. Stedworth was generally to be found alone.

She felt, however, that she was not in a condition to meet the eyes of any one less in her confidence than her landlady, and she therefore stood for a moment at the door before she opened it, in order to be quite sure she was alone.

Greatly did she rejoice that she had taken this precaution, for she presently became aware that there were at least two persons in the room, for she heard voices in conversation, though the sounds came so indistinctly

as to make her suppose that those engaged in it were speaking in whispers, and therefore probably as little desirous of her presence as she was of theirs. She was confirmed in this supposition by distinctly hearing the bolt of the door shot, a precaution which probably arose from her step having been heard without.

“God bless the good woman ! she need not fear that I want to be a spy upon her,” thought the indulgent Amelia, as she turned away with half a smile, and retraced her steps to her own apartment.

Amelia was indeed quite right in supposing that she would not have been so cordially received by her accommodating hostess had she ever shown any propensity for inquiring more into her goings on in any way than the said landlady volunteered to tell her. Mrs. Stedworth lived on very friendly and confidential terms with many of her lady customers, besides Miss Thorwold ; but the confidential part of their intercourse was not always mutual, Mrs. Stedworth having it

almost always in her power to repay by usefulness the unreserve of others, preferred that mode to the much less satisfactory one of gossiping about her own affairs in return.

Mrs. Stedworth was still a very handsome woman, and it would have been endless work had they thought it necessary to inquire how many lovers she had had, before they ventured to employ her. It was much more to the purpose to ascertain that she was employed, and highly favoured, by many ladies of high fashion—and these were inquiries which never failed to produce very satisfactory answers.

So Amelia went up stairs again, much more quickly than she had come down, and she took coffee, and then tea, and then a novel, and then her bed, her spirits recovering their usual calmness, as the hours wore away, but without losing one atom of steadfast purpose by their composure. Had she known that it was Lord William who was passing the evening in the parlour below her, it is just possible that she might not have

enjoyed so great a degree of philosophical calmness; but being happily ignorant of it, she not only went quietly to bed, but slept so soundly as to be quite unconscious of the continual absence of his lordship, till the next morning, when it became quite evident to her that nobody had occupied the sleeping apartment besides herself.

Her delicate cheeks wanted no rouge when she first made this discovery.

“Very well, my lord!—go on!—you are doing me all the good in the world! The only thing which could interfere to prevent my gaining exactly all I want by your name and connexion, would be my continuing to care one single farthing about your love. And if this sort of thing does not cure me, I must be desperately bad indeed.”

Having muttered this philosophical soliloquy, the fair Amelia rose and dressed herself, and determining not to blunder in the bold game she was about to play, for want of the assistance of a faithful friend and counsellor, she desired the maid-servant who

brought in her breakfast to inform her mistress that she desired to speak with her. The message was promptly delivered, and as promptly obeyed, and Amelia once more found herself seated tête-à-tête with her confidential friend, Mrs. Stedworth.

CHAPTER XIII.

“WELL! my dear good woman!” began the discontented-looking bride, “I have more strange news to tell you now. You will fancy, I suppose, that I have a prodigiously strong taste for adventures; but I protest to you, it is no such thing; on the contrary, I should vastly prefer going on to the end of time in the most jog-trot style in the world, provided only that the vehicle which carried me was fit for the use of a woman of fashion.”

“I hope that nothing has happened to vex your ladyship?” said Mrs. Stedworth, with her fine large eyes turned towards the ground, and a general air of peculiar modesty and meekness pervading her whole appearance.

“My ladyship does not intend to be vexed, Mrs. Stedworth, by any thing of the kind, I promise you. But his lordship has thought proper to absent himself during the whole night.”

“Is it possible?” exclaimed Mrs. Stedworth. And she spread her long, well-formed, whitish hand before her eyes, to testify that she was overwhelmed by the intelligence.

“Don’t be tragic, goody Stedworth, for mercy’s sake, or I must send you off instantly. The love part of the story is, I presume, pretty well over on both sides, and I rather suspect that we are both of us so essentially fashionable people that we do not appear to advantage either in the rural haunts of village swains, or in the orbit of such a snug little mouse-hole as your drawing-room, my dear Stedworth. But we all of us, I suppose, know well enough that marriage was only invented as a cure for love, and well it is that there is some cure, for Heaven knows that while the madness lasts, the wisest amongst us are little better than fools ;

nevertheless, with all my folly, and I will not deny that I have had my share, I never quite overlooked what I certainly consider as the principal object in existence. I never overlooked the rank and station of the individual about whom I permitted my fancy to run riot. But, do you know, my good woman—I don't believe you hear a word of what I am saying to you. There you sit, with your eyes fixed upon the carpet, as if you were counting the threads of it, instead of listening to me. What on earth is come to you? Do rouse yourself—I really want your advice, Mrs. Stedworth."

"I am sure, Miss Thorwold—I beg your pardon, Lady William I mean; I am sure I always have been, and always shall be, ready and willing to do any thing and every thing I can to assist you. But I have got one of my terrible headaches to-day, it is no good to deny it, and I know they always make me look heavy and stupid."

"That is very unlucky, and of course I am very sorry for it," replied her ladyship, looking, however, as if she thought there was a

good deal of impertinence in her having a headache at such a time. "But upon my word, Stedworth, you must please to forget it just for the present, for I have a great deal to do, and to think of, and I really want you to help me."

"And I am sure, ma'am, I shall be only too happy to do any thing I can to serve you," replied Mrs. Stedworth, suddenly rising and walking to the window.

"Do sit still then, will you, and not trot about the room so absurdly," returned Amelia, frowning with as much right honourable dignity, as if she fancied herself married to the duke, instead of his brother.

But Mrs. Stedworth appeared not to hear her, and not only continued standing, and looking out of the window, but took the liberty of walking from one window to the other that she might the better amuse herself, as it seemed, by looking up the street, and down the street. After a minute or two, however, she seemed conscious of what had been said to her, and obeying the commands of her ladyship, replaced herself in the chair she had

been desired to occupy, with the air of a person intending to listen unresistingly to all that was going to be said.

“Now then, let me tell you how I am situated,” said Amelia. “The secrecy, which, as you know—” But before she could finish the sentence, she was interrupted by the entrance of the servant of the house, who stepped rapidly towards her, and put a letter into her hand. “How did this come?” said she, looking up rather earnestly in the girl’s face, for she perceived that the address was in the handwriting of her husband, and it occurred to her that he had probably left it himself.

Amelia while waiting for the girl’s answer, was in the act of breaking the seal, but even at that moment, though pretty completely occupied by her own affairs, she was struck by the expression of the girl’s countenance. She had evidently been weeping, and her whole aspect, which was usually very gentle and pleasing, had now something rude and rough in it, that she could not understand.

“Where did you get this letter? Don’t you hear me?” said Amelia, frowning.

"I got it from the gentleman that is just gone out?" replied the girl.

"What gentleman?" demanded Amelia, impatiently.

"The gentleman that has been lodging here," returned the maid, in a tone as cross as that in which the question was asked.

"The gentleman that has been lodging here?" repeated Amelia. "Just gone out? Just come in, I suppose you mean?"

"No, I don't," replied the girl, with as little civility as was well possible.

"You are extremely impertinent to speak in the way you do, you saucy minx," said Mrs. Stedworth. "Go out of the room this moment."

"Yes, I will," replied the offender. "And out of the house too," she added, while her young face became as red as scarlet. "It don't suit me."

Mrs. Stedworth rose, and with considerable vehemence pushed the girl towards the door.

"Away with you, then, you huzzy," she exclaimed; "you got your wages yesterday,

so no more need be said. You are a right bad one, or I am very much mistaken. Be off! And I will be off too, to watch you, or I may find myself a few silver spoons the poorer."

The girl burst into tears, but said no more, and Mrs. Stedworth pushing her out before her, left the room and shut the door upon Amelia, and her letter.

The unfortunate beauty was by this time too deeply engaged in the perusal of it, to have heard any thing that passed, but she rejoiced in the consciousness that she was alone. The first words were indeed such as to produce emotions too violent to be witnessed. This tremendous letter was as follows :

" My dear Miss Thorwold.

" You are still too lovely a woman for me not to regret, for your sake, as well as my own, that you have not been contented to suffer the soft cloud which enveloped us so delightfully, to remain over us a little longer. But it is your will to tear it off, and I must submit. Were it not for the marvellously wife-

like tone which you assumed in our last conversation, my beautiful Amelia, I certainly should not think it possible that with your excellent good sense, and knowledge of the world, you could scarcely believe that the ceremony which has passed between us was any thing but a farce, calculated chiefly to amuse the good woman with whom we have been so comfortably lodged. She seems to be rather particularly strict in her notions upon such subjects, and I dare say we should not have been able to manage matters conveniently without it. But that you, my dear creature, could for a moment believe that I, of all men in the world, that I, in the sadly embarrassed state of my finances should run my free neck into the noose of matrimony, with a lady whom I have every reason to believe is as unlike Miss Upton Savage in her purse, as in her features ; that you, my lovely Miss Thorworld, should believe this, I freely confess, does appear to me almost impossible.

“It would, however, be extremely wrong for me to doubt your word on this subject, and therefore I am bound to believe that you really

fancy yourself my wife. If this be so, I must not shrink from the disagreeable task of undeceiving you. You are not my wife, my beautiful Amelia, but you have been to me infinitely dearer than any wife is ever likely to be, for it is now pretty evident that the only course left for me is to marry according to my imperious brother's very disagreeable wishes. I need say no more, Amelia, on this hateful subject. I am quite sure you will pity me. As to you, my sweet girl, though your conduct and manner last night, certainly vexed me a good deal, I do, and ever shall, feel a degree of tender interest for you which must always make your happiness a subject of deep anxiety to me.

“ At this painful moment of parting, it is a great satisfaction to me to remember that you are not, as yet, in the slightest degree committed in the eyes of your friends; a blessing, my dear Miss Thorwold, which is rarely enjoyed by a single lady in your rank of life, after yielding herself with a little too much facility to the affections of the heart.

“ But every thing, my sweet friend, seems

to have favoured you. I saw in the papers of yesterday, that your friend, Caroline Marchmont, is just dead at Nice. Nothing can be easier than for you to take advantage of this most happy coincidence.

“ I recommend your immediate return to Crosby. I know you have formerly been at Nice, and there will, therefore, be no danger of your being thrown out concerning the localities. All you have to do, is to return to Mrs. Knight, in mourning, and a good deal out of spirits at the loss of your friend. Then will follow, of course, a full explanation with Colonel Dermont and his family on the melancholy cause of your sudden absence; and I trust the fulfilment of your engagement with the young man will not be long delayed. A lover of twenty-one, or rather less, I believe, is easily urged to speed; and there are a thousand reasons, my sweet friend, which will make your immediate marriage a most pleasing event to me. I am sorry for the little roughness which took place between us last night. Let it be forgotten, my dear Miss Thorwold, and

nothing remembered but the happiness we have enjoyed in each other's society.

“ And now I must say adieu ! But I see no reason why it should be a lasting one. I have no doubt that your influence over your young bridegroom will be omnipotent ; and if so, you will of course make him bring you to London. And then, Amelia, we may meet again ; and if you will only promise me never again, while you are on the right side of forty, to let me see you looking as you did last night, I, on my side, will venture to promise you, that nothing could give me greater pleasure than being permitted to repeat the assurance of the affectionate esteem with which I now subscribe myself,

“ Yours, faithfully,

“ WILLIAM HAMMOND.”

Amelia shed no tears as she perused this precious document. No particle of softness mixed itself with the indignant rage which made her bosom swell ; neither did she exhaust her strength in calling him a wretch and traitor.

Had he, indeed, been securely bound within her reach, and a sharp stiletto in her grasp, it is possible he might have felt the force of a woman's fury; but as it was, Amelia thought much more of herself than of him. But while she was profoundly meditating on the possibility of actually executing the righteous scheme he had so ably sketched, an idea suddenly shot through her head, that not a word of what the letter contained might be true. Had she not been married in church? Were there not witnesses? Had not the woman Stedworth, and the man Morrison put their names as witnesses to the certificate she had so carefully secured in her writing-desk? Was not the infamous letter she held in her hand sufficient proof that the writer of it was villain enough to foreswear the most solemn marriage that ever bound man and woman together, provided only that his inclination or interest prompted him to do it, and that there was a fair chance of doing so with safety?

The obvious answer to this question caused

her to rise and ring the bell violently. It was answered by Mrs. Stedworth.

"Nothing the matter, ma'am, is there?" she said, entering the room with a face that seemed preparing itself to be frightened.

"Read that letter, Mrs. Stedworth," said Amelia, in reply.

Mrs. Stedworth took the letter and retired with it to the window, where she appeared to read it from beginning to end with the greatest attention, and a very proper proportion of horror and astonishment into the bargain.

"Oh! my dear lady! what can I say to you?" exclaimed Mrs. Stedworth, clasping her hands. "Is it possible that this terrible letter can be true?"

"Is it possible that you can ask the question?" said Amelia. "Are you not able to swear upon your own knowledge that it is false? Were you not yourself a witness to the ceremony? Did you not yourself see it performed in a church, and by a clergyman?"

"To be sure I did, my dear young lady," replied Mrs. Stedworth, with a sort of happy

smile, which seemed to show that the recollection of all this had relieved her mind from a vast deal of anxiety. "To be sure I did! How could I be such a fool, even for a moment, to put faith in such a contemptible falsehood. I am sorry to my heart, my dear lady, that my lord is not a better man, but such as he is, he is your husband sure enough, let him invent what lies he will to prove the contrary."

"And that man, Morrison, my dear Mrs. Stedworth? Do you happen to know where he lives, or any thing about him? My worthless lord gave me to understand that he was an intimate friend of his; which, all things considered, does him no particular honour, but at any rate it must place him in such a rank as will ensure his being listened to as a witness.—Why do you bite your lip in that way? Why do you turn away from me?"

"Never look at me! Never mind me, my dear precious lady!" replied the landlady, in great apparent agitation. "It is all nonsense, I am quite sure and certain that it is all nonsense, and you must not mind me. But

I will set my own mind at rest about it before I lay down to sleep."

"You will drive me mad, Mrs. Stedworth," cried Amelia impetuously, "if you go on uttering dark hints, that it is plain you do not intend I should understand. Pray do not pretend to fancy that this is the way to spare my feelings. I would rather ten thousand times that you would tell me at once that you know I am not married at all."

"God forbid, my dearest Miss Thorwold—my dearest Lady William, I would say, God forbid that I should ever utter such cruel words as those you have just spoken; and so far short of that were my thoughts, that I won't go on to make any scruple at all as to speaking what really did come into my head. I won't deny, Miss Thor—my lady, I mean—I won't attempt to deny that I was struck with the very odd out-of-the-way look of the clergyman. And now you speak of that man, Morrison, as a friend of my lord, I see no use in denying that I said to myself, when I first looked at him, which was just

after we got inside the church, I did say to myself, and that's the truth, that of all the gentlemen I ever saw, he had the least look of one. And, as to the clerk, there was a man who came forward by way of a clerk—I don't know whether you observed him, Miss Thorwold—my lady, I would say,—I don't know whether you happened to observe him, but I did, and really he might have been first cousin to the parson as far as his looks went."

"By all which, Mrs. Stedworth, I must presume that you mean to express doubts of the reality of my marriage. Speak plainly, if you please ; is it not so ?"

Had the unfortunate Amelia asked this question with any strong symptoms either of sorrow or of anger, it is possible that her excellent friend, Mrs. Stedworth, might have thought it proper, or at any rate humane, to have beat a little more about the bush before she answered yes. But there was such an admirable air of coolness and self-possession in the manner with which the fair questioner

awaited her answer, that she ventured to give it with the bold sincerity which seemed to be wished for.

“ Well then, Miss Thorwold, if it is your will that I should speak all my thoughts fully and truly, I will tell you at once, painful as it is to do so, that the more I think about his lordship’s letter, the more afraid I feel that it is true. At the first moment, it seemed to me quite ridiculous, and all that came into my head was, that I had seen you married with my own eyes; but the bare mention of the name of Morrison brought back the fellow’s look and manner to my mind so strongly, that I can’t help feeling that it makes this shocking statement the more likely. But that is all I say, my dear lady, I don’t mean to say that it is any thing like proof, any more than the looks of the clergyman and clerk. It would be folly and sin both, to take it in that light ; but this I do think, that it behoves me to make inquiries, and that brings me to what I said before, which was, that I won’t rest this

night, without getting at the truth, one way or the other."

"You are perfectly right, my dear Mrs. Stedworth. Nothing else can be of any real use to me. While you have been thinking over the looks of the parson and the clerk, I, my good friend, have been setting my wits to meditate on the real value of Lord William in the capacity of a husband, and truly the meditation has not ended by my wishing to keep very fast hold of him. That he is a villain of the very blackest dye, is quite evident, take the question in which way you will ; and, in truth, I hardly know which side of it presents him as the vilest scoundrel. But that signifies little. My interest in the matter, and of course yours, too, my dear woman, is, as to which way we can make this horrible business end with the least injury to me. If we prove the marriage to be a true one, I am Lady William Hammond, that is quite certain ; and it is quite certain, also, that the being Lady William Hammond is the very thing upon which I had set my

heart. But just fancy the sort of way in which I should make my appearance as a bride, if this infamous wretch chooses to persevere in his story? Its being false, will make very little difference in the only set that I much care about. Every body knows he is an abominable libertine, which will make it appear at any rate probable ; and I know there are dozens of women, maids, wives, and widows, who would take good care to make people suppose they believed it, whether they did or not. The doubtful Lady William-ship is, therefore, a very doubtful blessing ; and as to any comfort to be derived from wealth, I happen to know perfectly well that he is not only penniless, but desperately deep in debt. My few little innocent hundreds in that line are not worth mentioning in comparison."

"For all these excellent reasons," continued Amelia, fanning herself rather vehemently, (for the room was both small and hot,) "for all these reasons, Mrs. Stedworth, I do positively declare to you, that, provided I can trust to your fidelity respecting what has

happened between this hateful man and me, I would rather believe the ceremony which united us to be fictitious than real."

"Thank Heaven that I hear you say so, dear lady!" replied Mrs. Stedworth; "I shall now set about the work of inquiry with courage; for that inquiry must immediately be made is certain. Let it end as it will, no doubt must be left upon the subject."

"Assuredly, my good friend," replied Amelia, eagerly, "a great deal depends upon your being able to prove to me that in good truth I am Amelia Thorwold still. You have not forgotten, I am very sure, all that I told you in the letter which I wrote from the house of Colonel Dermont; have you?"

"Indeed I have not, my dear," replied Mrs. Stedworth, with suddenly increased familiarity, arising from the brilliant rapidity with which she caught Amelia's meaning. "You need not go on, dear. I see it all as plain as if it were written down in a book before me. You are the same clever creature I ever thought you, though I suspect you did suffer yourself to be a little taken in by his lordship."

“ Oh ! as to that, Stedworth, it is a sort of thing that no woman, let her be ever so clever, need be ashamed of. Neither women of fashion nor women of sense are exempted from the dear perils of love, you know ; and the superiority of some over others, is not, in my opinion, so much shown by coldness and caution, as by the manner in which what destroys one, is passed through by another with impunity. If I can really contrive to bring things back to the state in which they were when I wrote that letter, I will fairly confess to you, dear Stedworth, though to nobody else in the world, that I think I shall rather have gained than lost by my adventure. I mean to say that if I can manage, you know, to make all that has happened pass away as if it had been a dream, and nothing else, I should do what you and I are both thinking of, with a monstrous deal less repugnance than I should before ; and I really do not see why I should not. My abominable Don Juan will take care to keep silent for his own sake ; and you, dear Stedworth, will keep silent for mine.

Not, however, that I shall ever forget, in case this *should* happen, how much I owe you ; and one reason that will make it pleasant for me to think that in that direction, at least, there is plenty of money, so that I shall have the power of helping you."

" But don't you think, my dear, that such a termination of it all, as you hint at, and which of course I understand perfectly well ; don't you think, my dear, that it would be almost too painful for his lordship, who seemed, only a few days ago, to be so very much in love with you ?"

" Painful to him ? I wish I thought that I could plague him in any way, my dear soul ! But it will not be in that manner, at any rate. If I *could* but contrive to make it known in the right places, that the creature wears false hair on the top of his good-for-nothing, handsome head, and dyes all the rest, it *might* answer. But I don't know exactly how to manage this without running the risk of betraying a little better acquaintance with the divine Apollo than I may think it discreet to acknowledge.

“But we must not amuse ourselves in this way,” added Amelia, laughing, “or at any rate we must postpone doing so, till I really know which of his lordship’s two infernal lies is the real one. Will you set off directly, my dear, good Stedworth? I do assure you that you ought not to lose a moment. Trust me, that every thing will depend upon the promptitude, as well as the boldness of our measures.”

“And trust me, my dear, that no grass shall grow under my feet, nor under that of my cab-horse either, before I bring you back such a yes, or no, as you may depend upon.”

This was said by the friendly Mrs. Stedworth, as she left the room, and in a very few minutes afterwards, Amelia had the satisfaction of seeing her climb into a cab, and drive off towards Piccadilly at full gallop.

The interval which followed, certainly seemed rather a long one; but it would have appeared longer still to a person less capable of sedate meditation upon all the circumstances which surrounded her, than was Amelia.

It might truly be said, that among all the variety of events past, present, and possible, which called for her attention, there was scarcely one that escaped her ; and nothing could be more boldly strong-minded and masterly, than the order in which she arranged them all before her, in such a manner as might enable her to decide, the very moment her messenger returned, how she should act, and what she should do.

The day was considerably advanced, when Mrs. Stedworth re-appeared in the drawing-room, but she looked so weary and exhausted, that it was impossible to doubt her having made all the haste she could.

Of course, Amelia, notwithstanding all her admirable strength of mind, did feel a good deal of anxiety to hear the first word her messenger should utter ; but so evenly had she contrived to balance her wishes between MARRIED, or NOT MARRIED, that not even the air of melancholy which Mrs. Stedworth's countenance wore, sufficed to shake her equanimity.

“ What would become of me, my dear,”

said the poor woman, seating herself with every appearance of being quite exhausted, "what would become of me, at this moment, had I not heard you say what you did say, before I went out? It is dreadful to think of the wickedness of men! But as sure as you sit there, my dear, you are no more Lady William Hammond than I am."

"Villain!" exclaimed Amelia, setting her teeth, and looking for a moment as if the rage produced by knowing she had been deceived, was sufficient to overcome the pleasure with which, a moment before, she had been looking forward to the power of deceiving. But this emotion, or, at least, the demonstration of it, was but transitory. "For goodness' sake, don't cant, Stedworth," she said sharply, "tell me how the matter stands at once."

"I will, my dear, I will, if I have breath for it. The church to which you went to be married, is, as you must have seen if you had looked round it, under repair. His lordship got hold of two of the workmen, who not only agreed to act as parson and clerk,

but also got at the clergyman's dress, and book, and every thing. As to his friend, Morrison, the rascal was his own servant. And this was the way, my poor, dear child, in which we were both fooled! What a deep creature he must be, mustn't he?"

"Deep?" repeated the indignant Amelia, "he will be deep enough by and bye, if all be true that is taught. But the banns, Stedworth? Had he really the audacity to have the banns published?"

"God bless you, my dear, no—not he, indeed. The whole business, from beginning to end, was humbug, and nothing else."

Again Amelia ground her teeth, and muttered, "Villain!" but she recovered herself immediately, and said, with as much composure as if her destiny was the most assured and happy that ever fell to the lot of mortal. "I shall have a letter or two to write this morning, Stedworth, and I wish you would let Susan bring me up something by way of dinner immediately."

"I shall be very happy to wait upon you myself, Miss Thorwold." Amelia started

as this name, unchecked, as heretofore, by an after-thought, was thus bluntly addressed to her. "I beg your pardon, a thousand times, my dear young lady, if I have given you pain," said Mrs. Stedworth, in her best manner, "but basely as you have been defrauded of another name, it is surely best to accustom yourself to this, lest the starting from it before other eyes might lessen your opportunities of selecting another."

"Selecting!" muttered the ill-treated beauty. "But all this is very silly. You are quite right, my good friend, and pray let me hear myself called Miss Thorwold as much as you think proper."

"Would you like better that I should call you Amelia, my dear?" said the kind woman.

"No, I thank you," replied the lady, colouring; "I will not trouble you to do any thing so unusual. But what was it you were going to say to me when I so foolishly interrupted you?"

"I was going to say, my dear, that I should be happy to wait on you myself,

because that good-for-nothing Susan has positively forced me, at last, to turn her out of the house. She is a thorough bad girl, if ever there was one."

"Well, well, never mind Susan, but let me have something to eat immediately, I shall not feel easy till I have written my letters."

It was not Mrs. Stedworth, however, but a sufficiently dirty charwoman, who brought up Amelia's black-looking little chicken. It was very odd; she had certainly never seen a chicken look so before during all the time she had been in the house. Was it an accident? Or was it, indeed, because she was not Lady William Hammond? The doubt did not tend to improve her appetite, but it increased the haste with which she dismissed the meal, and set about the composition of her letters. She wrote two. The first was to Mrs. Dermont, and was as follows:—

"My dearest Mrs. Dermont,

"You will, I doubt not, have seen by the papers that my poor friend, Caroline March-

mont, is no more! The few weeks I passed with her at Nice were, as you will easily believe, extremely painful, but I can never cease to rejoice that I was with her to the very last. Her affection and gratitude to me were unbounded. I only remained at Nice till the funeral was over, and then took advantage of the protection of a worthy French merchant, who, with his wife, was going to Paris, in order to return from my short but very melancholy banishment. The Marchmont family are gone on to Italy and kindly wished me to accompany them. But—I know not why I should fear to confess it—my heart is in England; dear, domestic, happy England! And to England I determined to return. And now, my dear and kind Mrs. Dermont, I am going to open my heart to you as I would to a mother. And I am quite, quite sure you will not betray me. When the news of my poor friend's illness reached me at Crosby, accompanied with her earnest request, seconded by that of her unhappy family, that I would accompany them abroad, I instantly decided that I would comply with

it, but on mentioning my intention to my dear friend, Mrs. Knight, she laughed. Yes, kind as I have ever found her, she, at that very painful moment, made light of the agony from which I was suffering, and ridiculed the idea of my complying with my friend's request. I am now quite aware that she must have done this from an excellent motive—namely, the hope of preventing me from taking a journey which she, doubtless, foresaw must end in the melancholy event which has too surely taken place; and it was her wish to spare me the witnessing this which led her to adopt the tone which wounded me so cruelly. But, at the moment, my heart rebelled against what appeared to me to be a great want of feeling, and I grieve to say, that I left her house without taking leave of her. Under these circumstances, my dear Mrs. Dermont, I cannot volunteer a renewal of my visit to her previously to my returning to my usual abode with Lord and Lady Ripley. And yet I cannot resist the too strong inclination which I feel to revisit the dear neighbourhood of Stoke before returning to

my usual home. I have experienced too much kindness from Mrs. Knight to doubt that a very short interview would suffice to set every thing right between us. But I cannot present myself at her door, after having passed through it the last time in so very ungracious a manner.

“ May I, my dear madam, in this painful dilemma, ask you again to extend your hospitality to me? It may appear to you, perhaps, under all the circumstances, as rather a singular request. But where the heart speaks as distinctly as mine does, the voice of ceremony and etiquette is, I believe, but seldom listened to. I shall eagerly await your answer, and whether it be *yea* or *nay*, I entreat you to believe me ever most respectfully and affectionately yours,

“ AMELIA THORWOLD.”

The second letter was to Mrs. Knight, and ran thus:

“ My dearest Mrs. Knight,

“ I hope you have long ago forgiven me for the impetuosity which made me leave

you so abruptly, as sincerely as I have forgiven you for the caustic ridicule with which you treated my really sincere affection for my poor lost Caroline. Of course you know that the last act of that sad tragedy is over. I remained with the family till the day after the funeral, but declined their earnest invitation to accompany them to Rome, where they intend to pass the winter. I might, perhaps, have been tempted, notwithstanding the melancholy which reigns among them, to have taken this opportunity of looking at the immortal Apollo, had not sundry very sober and rational hours of meditation convinced me that I can never reasonably hope for any thing better than the fate which you have of late been so earnestly recommending to me. In truth, I now dislike the idea of it much less than I did. The utter heartlessness of the man to whom I have so long given more thoughts than he was worth, has completely cured me of that fancy. I now see him as he really is, and this might suffice to cure a tenderer love than mine. This is an opportunity so

favourable for renewing my acquaintance in a certain quarter, that I do not hesitate to profit by it, and I have, therefore, written to good Mrs. Dermont, mentioning my little *fracas* with you, and asking permission to come to the Mount till such a time as we should have met and made it up. I hope I shall receive an agreeable answer from her, and, if so, I think all will go well. You must not be startled at seeing me in deep mourning. I could not well avoid it. Adieu, my dear friend! In the hope of soon meeting more pleasantly than we parted, I remain ever faithfully and affectionately yours,

“AMELIA THORWOLD.”

The delight of Mrs. Dermont at receiving the letter addressed to her by the beautiful idol of her son's affections, was great indeed, and never in her whole life, perhaps, had she felt more completely happy than when she set off with it in her hand to seek him in his favourite retreat in the shrubbery. This favourite retreat was the same bench on which she had found him seated,

with Julia standing before him, some short three months before, when she had sought him, with his father, for the purpose of asking his opinion respecting her fête on the lawn.

The good lady, though not much accustomed to take comprehensive views on any subject, could not help thinking as she walked from the house into the "wilderness," what a wonderful change had been wrought among them all, during this short interval. Alfred, although she had considered him then as the most important young man that ever lived, was now, beyond all question, become a more important young man still. And little Julia too; though, of course, nothing which had happened, or which could have happened to her, could be accounted of the same consequence, she could not help smiling, as she thought of the marvellous alteration which three months had made in her. An offer of marriage! a splendid offer of marriage! And refused too, as if she expected for herself, and they all expected for her, the power of picking and

choosing through all the world. And she to, just the very day before the fête, such a very particularly plain-looking young little thing! And now, this most beautiful and admired young lady, writing to her in such a sweet daughter-like way, and making her feel happier than ever she did in her whole life before, by showing so plainly by her charming letter, that if Alfred loved her she loved Alfred too, and that, well enough to make her do what very few young ladies in her situation, pretty creature, would have had the courage to think of.

And lucky it was for Amelia that this excellent lady did so truly and sincerely think that where her son Alfred was concerned, all ordinary rules of action might be laid aside with the most perfect impunity, as otherwise, it is more than probable that the frankness of the beautiful Amelia's proceeding might have appeared to her rather startling.

But it would be stuff and nonsense to think any thing of the kind in the present case, and the woman who would think of

treating *him* as she would do any other young man, could not be worthy of becoming his wife.

Smiling pleasantly, as she thought of all this, and with the open letter in her hand, she set off to find her son. And she did find him exactly where she expected, and what was odd enough, considering how she had been thinking about the last time she had looked for him there, she found Julia with him. The only difference was, that Julia was not standing now, but sitting on the bench beside him. Alfred was leaning back, his shoulders supported against the trunk of an elm-tree that shaded and sheltered this favourite spot both from sun and wind.

It was an autumnal breeze which now whistled through its branches, yet still the seat was a very pleasant seat; Alfred leaned back, and his eyes were fixed apparently upon a bed of now blossomless American shrubs which occupied the space before him. But there was something in the look that made it doubtful whether he indeed saw what was before

him. Julia was not looking in the same direction; she was sitting sideways upon the bench, and not only looking at Alfred but seeing him.

The last four or five weeks had done much towards tranquillising her spirits; she no longer either scorned or reproached herself so severely for loving where she was not loved. She had been brought up in the belief that Alfred was not an ordinary mortal, and her peculiarly acute consciousness of this fact ought not as she began to think to be laid to her charge as a crime. The friendly kindness with which he had more than once expressed his satisfaction at her having refused Mr. Borrowdale's proposal, "because he did not think the young man sufficiently intellectual to be worthy of her;" and the unexpressed, but strongly felt alteration in his manner of treating her, no longer expressing himself as if he considered her merely as a child, had altogether soothed her greatly. Julia felt certain that she was not born to be a happy woman; but now she began to hope

that, with the blessing of Heaven upon her earnest endeavours to be contented with her lot, she should not be as wretched a one as she had thought she must be when she had first heard Alfred confess his passion for Miss Thorwold, at the very moment that she was expecting an avowal of love to herself.

And quite in conformity to this state of feeling was the expression of her sweet face. Her complexion, which was not so much pale as delicately white, was set off to the greatest possible advantage by her satin-like black hair, and by those long black eye-lashes which even when the eye itself was not seen, announced its rich darkness, and at that moment there was a gentle, placid, half-melancholy smile upon her lips which made her exquisitely white teeth a little visible; in short, she looked youngly, freshly, innocently lovely.

But Alfred did not see it ; he was gazing instead, (foolish youth !) most intently gazing upon the vision of Amelia, conjured into his presence by the joint agency of memory and

imagination, just as he had seen her waltzing in the drawing-room at Crosby, the last time he had ever looked at her.

“What are you thinking of, Alfred?” said his mother, gaily, “and who are you thinking of, my darling son? Shall I guess, Alfred?”

“Oh! mother, mother! it is no theme for jesting! Every moment of my life seems wire-drawn into an endless—what is it you have got there? Oh! give it to me, my dearest, dearest mother, if it be any thing that brings us news of her!”

“There! Take it, you dear impatient,” replied the happy lady, placing the precious letter in his hands, “and when you have read it, tell me what answer you think it will be most proper to return?”

“Answer? What answer shall you send, my dearest mother?” cried the enchanted Alfred, starting up, and looking as if he had wings on his shoulders, and already felt as if he were half way to heaven, “Come back! come back to the house this moment—come you too, Julia! you must come too, for you must read this divine letter to know how

supremely happy I am, and not for the wealth of worlds would I lose sight of it."

"Then I perceive I am to say yes, Alfred? Is that it?" said his well-pleased mother. "Unless Julia thinks we can say any thing more to the purpose," replied the young man, playfully bending over Julia as she read the precious scroll, and pointing with his finger to some of the most enchanting words.

Good Mrs. Dermont, who was in general rather dignified in her movements, now stepped more rapidly towards the house than she had ever done since she had first enjoyed the happiness of calling it her own. The colonel was sought for, and found in a field near the house; the blessed letter shown, his consent to the "yes," playfully asked, and joyously given; and the letter bag locked up and ready for the postman a good hour-and-a-half before he called for it.

It would be mere folly to attempt describing the ever increasing ecstasy of Alfred's feelings as the hour approached which was to bring the beautiful Amelia to his home for the avowed purpose, for so his bounding

heart whispered to him, of receiving the vows from which her too timid, too sensitive, delicacy had shrunk when last they parted. His happiness beamed in his beautiful eyes and seemed to sit triumphant on his noble brow. His father looked at him with proud delight. His mother with joy, admiration, and unbounded love. The very menials were made to understand that a great and most felicitous event was approaching. And they too, looked radiant with joy and strong beer, quaffed to the health of their young master and his beautiful bride.

And poor Julia! How did she look? In truth she let as few people see her looks as possible. For never before, no not even when Alfred first proclaimed to her his love, had she felt so utterly averse to the idea of his marriage as she did now.

There was something in the whole of Amelia's conduct which disgusted her, although she could by no means fully comprehend it. In vain did she tell herself that this averseness, which really almost amounted to terror, as she thought of the probable

speed with which this marriage was now likely to go on; it was in vain that she told herself that all these feelings were of course the natural consequence of her own unrequited affection, and of all the bitter regrets that were sure to follow it—regret for its being felt—regret for its being unrequited. It would not do. This was *not* the cause of her present uneasiness. Nor could she even to herself explain what was.

As neither the colonel, his lady, nor the thrice happy lover himself, had ever appeared for a single moment to perceive anything strange, or in any way indecorous in her thus inviting herself to the home of her acknowledged, though not affianced lover, so young a girl as Julia could scarcely even to herself acknowledge that she thought them all wrong. But spite of all she could do to prevent it, the idea recurred to her again and again that, both in their parting and their meeting, there was something that looked as if she were *playing him*, as an angler does the fish that he has hooked.

“Dear, generous, warm-hearted Alfred!

whose very faults have been as carefully grafted into him, as if they had been so many cardinal virtues, and which have mixed so much of the native stock with their foreign nature, as one and all, to have become amiable—though not wise. This self-will is only an ardent energy of purpose; and what would be vanity in another, is in him but a generous confidence in the goodwill of all who approach him. And must I see such a being as this made prey of by such a thing as Amelia Thorwold? Oh! Alfred, my love is fatal to thee! But for this, she should never be thy wife. I would keep watch and ward over you both, and greatly am I mistaken if I should not find cause to make you all pause before the awful deed was done. But as it is! If ever, in after years, my pertinacity in living single, or any other symptom, were to open his eyes to the truth, might he not, to the very last hour of his life, suspect that my passion for him had caused me to use the blighting influence which had parted them? Could I bear this? would it not be worse than death?"

These, and such-like meditations, ceased not to torment poor Julia during the time which elapsed between the despatching the rapturous letter which announced Amelia's welcome, and the period of her arrival. And then her deep mourning, a sort of subdued look, that might be taken either for sorrow or sickness (though her complexion was, if any thing, rather more blooming than before), and a general air of gentle kindness to every body—herself included—if it did not quite set her heart at rest, as to her deserving all the devoted love which Alfred betrayed, sufficed to create just sufficient doubt, as to whether she might not have hitherto judged her rather harshly, to settle the question of interference or non-interference in the beauty's favour, and to determine her to let matters take their course, trusting that, if any thing very bad lay behind, Heaven would grant eyes to see it, to somebody besides herself.

END OF VOL. II.





